A MODEL FOR RECONNECTING
FAMILIES AND CHILDREN
TO CHURCH LIFE

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ABSTRACT

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The context of this project was Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church in

Teachey, North Carolina. The problem addressed was the lack of connection between the

church and families, especially children of the community. The resultant hypothesis was

that reconnecting families and children to the church could improve many aspects of

church life. Assessments included: an interview; four training sessions; a pre and post-

test; and children observations. Results indicated that church members, families, and

children favored reconnection to church life. Attitudes and attendance improved after

training sessions which included: wisdom and hospitality, historical figures, meaningful

church doctrines, and interdisciplinary models.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To this litany of inspirational and prestigious women from my boundless community of life: Bertha Mae Boney, the late Hattie Jane Johnson, Linda Chatman, Geraldine Armstrong, Brookie C. Lamb, Chineta Maddox, the late Dorothy Corbett, Bertie J. Boney, Barbara Nixon, the late Juanita Boney, Margaret Payton, Doris Davis, Mary H. Wright, Juanita Monoghan, Earline Seabrook, Melvinia Farrior, the late Thelma Thompson, Lena Brown, Carolyn Cromartie, the late Wilma Wallace Miller, Kimberly Walker, Betty Simmons, Gloria Hansley, Ann Sellars, and Gail Albergottie, I wholeheartedly thank you for your wisdom and confidence in me.

DEDICATION

With infinite thanks and appreciation, I sincerely dedicate this church model action research project to my three lovely, charismatic, intelligent, talented, and generous daughters: Hermanda, Hatalee, and Herleesha. Your unconditional love, respect, and support during this academic journey served as the impetus to launch my project and bring it to fruition. Over the years, you three have eagerly given to me your time, patience, and understanding.

To my late beloved mother, Malissie Johnson Boney, I am elated and thankful to have received your words of wisdom concerning the duties and responsibilities God has entrusted to adults for guiding and training children. Mother, you passionately instilled in me to respectfully pull with humility from God's overflowing river of strength during my trials and triumphs as I travel throughout the world in pursuit of my destiny in life. Similarly, I was inspired by my late devoted sister, Helen Wakefield Boney Williams, who was the epitome of strengthening family bonds and reconnecting family relationships for the survival of the family, especially through her generosity of self-sacrifices and yearning for ongoing education of the family.

And, with utmost respect and humility, I generously give thanks to our God with omnipotent powers of wisdom, knowledge, healing, and comfort. Therefore, with much determination, I endeavor to go forth and fulfill the calling that God has bestowed upon me.

INTRODUCTION

Within the last twenty-five years at Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church, there has been a drastically noted decline in their congregation attendance on Sundays, especially with families, women, and children. Previously, throughout the decades, this church was very prominent and prosperous with over 300 to 400 within the congregation most Sundays. Now, the scenario is much more bleak and dismal plummeting to an estimated thirty to fifty in attendance.

Quite noticeably, the majority of the members are African American seniors over sixty years of age. Upon observation, there is an outstanding number of females, thus making the ratio a more prevalent number of females to males. Since this has been the demographics of the environment for several decades, many of the members are becoming alarmingly comfortable with the downward spiraling church attendance of members, families, children, and God's children throughout the community.

Perhaps, some have been disowning the situation, making it comfortable to deny the attendance occurrence. However, some have reported that they are reasonably disturbed with the circumstances and desire a robust change to improve the situation of decreasing church attendance. Some even suggest that the church's survival may soon be consumed with irreconcilable peril as the congregation attendance reaches to lower levels.

The researcher is from this church located in rural southeastern North Carolina. The research was conducted from a pragmatic perspective interlaced with a Christian worldview, making it the most optimal approach to render any meaningful and productive support to this church. Hopefully, a collaboration could occur among all the church members. Then, a collective attempt to assist them with resolving these church issues pertaining to reconnection of families and children to church life, as well as increased attendance would be feasible.

Such a plan would entail the hypothesis to examine the proposed church model that could reconnect families and children to church life and increase church attendance. This challenge could be accomplished through a four-facet investigation. Data comprising this examination would generously include: wisdom and hospitality, historical figures, meaningful church doctrines, and interdisciplinary models.

To pursue this investigation, various avenues of data were explored to determine the usefulness of this model for reconnecting families and children to church life and increasing church attendance. Therefore, it was necessary to select biblical scriptures and verses that are compatible with the situation at hand. Therefore, Old Testament scripture Proverbs 22:6 was ideal for this mission as the epitome of wisdom for training and guiding children. Whereas, New Testament scripture Mark 10:13-16 embraced the generosity and acceptance of children by Jesus.

Next, a historical contributor, such as the renowned and illustrious Richard Allen had to be identified. There is definitely a prominent and well-established relationship and commonality throughout history with Allen and the church congregation. Much of Allen's Methodist rhetoric pronounced the survival and interconnectedness among the

free, the enslaved Negro, and the church. The rudimentary notion is that they would survive as "oneness" or they would perish.

Such a conception is profound insightfulness from a Negro born in the 1700's into slavery. Further, he witnessed his mother and younger siblings being sold, and later paid for his own freedom. Just this brief recapitulation of Allen's life and legacy provides a very compelling narrative to share with Methodist church members in the twenty-first century.

To further relate to issues of Rockfish AME Church, practical theology had the precision to identify several demanding facets of the family that are plaguing and causing chaos and destruction to its very existence. Most minorities, in particular, women and children are the main victims of this deleterious culprit. They continually encounter economic disparities, social injustices, gender and racial inequalities, and overall oppression in today's global society.

Yet, sometimes to resolve even religious dilemmas, one must venture into the vast interdisciplinary arena to search for theoretical models of prevention and intervention. Other robust models aligned with Christian perspectives were explored for their utility. Several were included that advocated collaboration and inclusion of its members, both employer and employee.

In essence, it was from the aforementioned components of the four areas: biblical, historical, theological, and theoretical that compiled a comprehensive church model. This church model was used to assist with the Rockfish AME Church attendance issue. More promptly, it was utilized to examine the reconnection of families and children to church life. From this investigation, Rockfish AME Church would be able to differentiate the

variables that are hindering its growth and development through church attendance, especially involving families with women and children.

To elaborate more concisely, this undertaken at Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church became a qualitative action research project with a narrative focus. It was comprised of: an interview phase; four training sessions; a pre-test and a post-test; and children observational data. The demographics involved both females and males. The groups consisted of forty-two participants for the pre-test and thirty-one participants for the post-tests.

At least fifty children accompanied the adults. They sat in a different section of the room and were engaged in various wholesome Christian activities. Interestingly, during breaks between sessions, adults and children positively interacted in these activities. This fostered the reconnection of families and children to church life and increased church attendance.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

Hattie Boney Anderson is the daughter of a hardworking farmer, the late Albert Henry Boney and his late wife, Malissie Johnson Boney. Within a family of six siblings and two parents, living in a four-room house, the meaning of sharing, caring, and sacrificing was obtained at an early age due to the limited resources of my father's meager farmer's income in Duplin County, North Carolina. Yet, it was inconceivable to believe that we were poverty-stricken. We always had fresh vegetables to eat from the garden, cured ham and sausage in the meat house, chickens and eggs from the hen house throughout the year, and sweet potatoes packed away under the dirt-covered straw pods during wintry months.

My mother was known throughout the neighborhood as being an outstandingly superb cook on her wooden stove. In fact, neighbors within the Iron Mine community, and later some from different ethnic groups of other counties, would graciously give her donations to make Christmas cakes and pies. As years have passed, I have often reminisced about the days when my siblings and I would race from the school bus as we smelled the tantalizing food aroma from mom's pots seeping through the back screened door.

True, my siblings and I would not have nickels and quarters to spend for extra snacks as many of the other more affluent family children at school. However, now with

delightful chuckles, I recall so vividly the times when many of those children would trade their paid lunches for my "mama-made" sandwiches. Even some of the teachers would exchange fruit from my lunch bag for cake and sandwiches cooked by my mama.

My mother had other qualities that made her undeniably a remarkable woman with skills and talents that highly surpassed most other women of that era. Yes, indeed, she was a stern, but religious and ambitious mother. Though we lived over eight miles from our African Methodist Episcopal Church, our mother insisted that we attend Sunday school each Sunday at a nearby neighborhood Baptist Church. She adamantly proclaimed that the same God was in both churches.

She was persistent on enforcing two standard rules: children should attend church to receive God's word, and they should attend school to receive an education. Though many children dropped out of school in my rural community, my mother demanded that all her children finish high school. It was very difficult when living in rural areas, especially as we were children of tenant farmers and sharecroppers. Children had major duties and responsibilities to ensure that the crop harvest was fully maintained and prepared, along with their parents, from the beginning of seed-planting to final market sales.

Routinely, my older sister and I would often miss the first month of school with cured tobacco preparations for the market. One week I would miss an entire week, and the next week my sister would miss a week of school. This rotation would occur throughout middle and high school during the entire month of August and half of September. We would collect homework from each other's teachers or classmates and send work back to school the next day of our work-week.

On one occasion, this type work-school rotation schedule during the beginning of school created an unforgettable humiliating encounter for me. I was utterly embarrassed on my first day back at high school in the ninth grade as my teacher asked in a disdain tone if anyone in class knew if I had moved due to my frequent absences at school. Even today, as I faintly remember the muffed giggling, the scars of shame and humiliation still sting. However, I shall never forget the look of astonishment on that teacher's face when I made the highest score on her detailed chapter test though I had incurred frequent absences.

 This teacher, as well as others, would have been amazed to discover that my mother insisted that school homework be completed after finishing a day's farm work and chores, even if we did not attend school that day. Yes, this mandated task of doing homework after a grueling and tiresome workday is probably difficult for most individuals to fathom. But, my mother's tenth grade education with realizing the necessity of an education provided her with the impetus to train and encourage her six children in the educational arena. In fact, for my older siblings, my mother served as their dictionary and encyclopedia, for we could not afford such luxuries.

Throughout her life as a wife and mother, my mother had to overcome numerous traumatic obstacles to ensure the wellbeing and education of her children. Namely, she had to venture onto roads never expecting to travel when she became a widow in her mid-forties with four of her six children under the age of eighteen. My father died in his early fifties, and this created much upheaval and disruption within our family.

My father's white farm landlord vehemently insisted to my mother that she withdraw my oldest brother from college to care for her crops along with my younger

brother. With much pride and frustration, my mother responded with a resounding no to her demands concerning my brother's withdrawal from college. She assured the white landlord that her crops would be harvested and delivered to market in a timely fashion.

It was then that I truly became cognizant of a glimpse of her strength and wisdom of how she expeditiously sought educational plans for the survival of her family. With only a tenth grade education, my mother developed a family plan to safeguard the education of each of her children. With the death of my father, she revealed the painful, yet course of action that all members of the family had to strictly adhere to for each sibling to be educated.

Initially, all monies from work outside the landlord's farm had to be given to our mother for assisting with sending my oldest sister to college. Then, in turn, my older sister, as the primary financial supporter, would pay the financial obligations in college of the next child, my brother. All the siblings made the commitment after finishing college to send the next sibling to college or trade school.

This college chain would never be broken until each sibling had completed college or trade school. To date, all my siblings and I had obtained a college degree or a certificate from a trade school. Under no circumstances would the college chain be broken or delayed, for this was unacceptable to my mother. Consequently, as children and adolescents, we were frequently teased by the community kids and adults for having to give our money to our mother. Sadly, at times, we too, began to think among ourselves, that our mother was being too austere, strict, and harsh with her standards on education, as well as church. Admittedly, I nor any of my siblings ever articulated these

negative feelings to my mother. To date, my siblings and I are immensely grateful to our mother for establishing the educational chain system within our family.

It was very difficult for my mother as a farmer's wife to attend PTA meetings at night after a hard and tiresome day from working in the fields. Sometimes, she would be the only parent from our little community attending the nightly meetings. With years of regret, my sisters and I would be embarrassed with our mother's attire of wearing the same unfashionable gray-stripped skirt to each meeting. Once, we even hid her skirt. Then, we discovered that she was unable to attend PTA, for she did not have any other suitable attire.

She explained to us her role as a parent in attending the PTA. The purpose was to ensure that we were getting the best education possible, regardless of the clothes she wore provided they were clean. Our mother emphasized that it was not only her job to support the teacher, but to make certain that her children were treated fairly though we were not considered one of the affluent families.

Further, my mother expressed the reason why she did not buy new clothes to wear as some of the other mothers. She wanted to be able to make certain that money would be available for all her children to get a new pair of shoes at the beginning of school, as well as one new outfit for school. Also, all extra money was needed to assist with the sibling that was in college at the time. Through the tears, we promised never to hide her one and only PTA skirt again.

Before our mother died, her children made concerted efforts to express their appreciation to her. Every year, she was given a birthday party and invited all the neighbors. She would take several trips a year from coast to coast throughout the United

States, and sometimes internationally. At times, she had difficulty deciding what to wear for church and other gatherings. The reason for her indecisiveness on attire was because she had two to three closets of fashionable clothes, including matching hats, purses, and shoes to make her choices.

Interestingly, many of the obstacles my mother encountered and overcome have served as an ongoing baseline as I reach for clarity and meaning of incidents that have impacted my life, both positively and negatively. Throughout my lifetime, I experienced various hardships and discomforts. Yet, God has bestowed a multitude of blessings to ease conflicts and stressors. This was revealed before turning three years of age when doctors informed my parents that I would die within a few weeks due to unknown causes. Miraculously with God's divine intervention, needless to say, I survived.

During one of the earliest and most horrific hurricanes recorded in North Carolina's history, Hurricane Hazel in 1954, God's majestic powers were amidst the protective circle for the family and neighbors. They were not aware of their hazardous exposure outside, in the eye of this catastrophic hurricane, after the front end of the hurricane had dissipated. With God's divine mercy, all her family and neighbors were saved.

Similarly, other injuries occurred to me through several automobile accidents, and as a result much pain is endured. Each encounter was devastating, and only God allowed the survival from the damaging wreckage. Additionally, two individuals died in my arms, one being my mother. However, I was reassured that God has a special mission for my Christian service.[1]

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[1] Lucius M. Dalton, *Doing What God Requires* (Lithonia, GA: Orman Press, 2003).

As aforementioned, my mother was an extraordinary woman who instilled both wholesome educational goals and Christian values within her children. After high school graduation, North Carolina Central University in Durham, North Carolina was the selected choice of study. I obtained my undergraduate degree in psychology and afterwards a graduate degree in psychology from Howard University in Washington, DC. With the educational legacy expressed by my mother, I have encouraged my three daughters to attend colleges and universities to receive their undergraduate and graduate degrees.

For over eight years I served as a university faculty member at various sites. Also I have been dedicated for twenty years as a mental health agency employee where professional services were extended to both adult and children populations. Additionally, several state and federal grants were written to assist At-Risk and model elementary school children in gaining self-esteem and empowerment to think positively about themselves. As a result, participants developed better home and school interactions.

At Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church, I have spearheaded several Christian programs. I have held numerous offices including Pulpit Aide Society, Stewardess Board, Usher Board, Young People Department (YPD), and Church Homecoming Programs. A wealth of joy and satisfaction will remain with me from the involvement of these auxiliary church programs.

Interestingly, Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church derived its name from its location in southeastern Duplin County. These sites of Wallace, North Carolina were the determinants of its name: the Rockfish Community, Township of Rockfish, and

its close proximity to Rockfish Creek.[2] Due to zoning purposes, Rockfish AME Church has been considered locations in both Wallace and Teachey of Duplin County. These two rural towns are adjacent to each other in Duplin County.

This County is located in the Southeastern Coastal Plain of North Carolina of the United States of America. Duplin County was established in 1750. Originally, it was the northern part of new Hanover County. Later in 1784, Duplin County was divided. Its western section was designated as Sampson County.[3]

Duplin County's location within North Carolina is very unique. It is approximately eighty miles from Raleigh, North Carolina and sixty-five miles from Fayetteville, North Carolina in the vicinity of highly noted Fort Bragg Military base. Also, Duplin County is sixty-five miles from well-visited beaches and waterways in Wilmington, North Carolina along the Atlantic Ocean. Favorably, it is this close proximity to the coast that greatly affects the relatively mild and moderate temperature of Duplin County. Roughly, the average temperature is around sixty-three degrees.[4]

At present, according to the 2010 Census Report, the geography of Duplin County indicates that it comprises a total of 819 square miles. The land occupies at least 818 square miles. Whereas, water covers only one square mile according to land area, Duplin County is the ninth largest county in North Carolina.[5]

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[2] Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church, "Church Anniversary Celebration," November 28, 2010.

[3] "Discover Duplin County History," Duplin County North Carolina, accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.duplincountync.com/aboutDuplinCounty/history.html.

[4] "Discover Duplin County History," accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.duplincountync.com/aboutDuplinCounty/history.html.

[5] "Discover Duplin County History," accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.duplincountync.com/aboutDuplinCounty/history.html.

Wallace, North Carolina is the largest town in Duplin County with a population of 3,565 as recorded from the U.S. Bureau of Census, 2010. The median income is estimated at $30,444. For housing dwellings, it has 975 owner housing units and 594 renter-occupied dwellings. In regards to race, the estimate shows 2,132 whites, 755 African Americans, and 740 Hispanics or Latinos.[6] In fact, Wallace, North Carolina is my birthplace. Initially, the town of Wallace, North Carolina was known and incorporated in 1873 as Duplin Roads, North Carolina. Later, the town was incorporated as Wallace, North Carolina in 1899.[7] From 1800 to 1834, Wallace had very slow growth, and most of the population was near the North East Cape Fear River. The major crop turpentine was shipped to Wilmington by riverboat and timber rafts.[8]

In 1834, with the building and completion of the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad, Wallace began to steadily show much population growth and crop expansion. Around 1940, Wallace, North Carolina was the world's supreme producer of strawberries. Later, Wallace Chamber of Commerce was proficient in persuading various manufactures to relocate to the Wallace area. These included: Delcraft, Stevcoknit, two J. P. Stevens Plants, and the Jayzee Corporation Sewing Company.[9]

According to North Carolina Department of Agriculture and North Carolina State University recent statistics, Duplin County currently has some very impressive

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[6] "Quick Facts United States Duplin County, North Carolina," United States Census Bureau, accessed December 12, 2015, http: http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/37061.

[7] Kris Bryant and Thelma Dingus Bryant Library Staff, "The Collections on The History of Wallace, North Carolina," Unpublished Document, Wallace, NC, 2003.

[8] Kris Bryant and Thelma Dingus Bryant Library Staff, "The Collections on The History of Wallace, North Carolina," Unpublished Document, Wallace, NC, 2003.

[9] Kris Bryant and Thelma Dingus Bryant Library Staff, "The Collection on The History of Wallace, North Carolina," Unpublished Document, Wallace, NC, 2003.

agriculture rankings. This relates especially for raising animals as a food commodity for both the state of North Carolina and the entire United States. Without a doubt, pigs and chicken, as well as turkeys, are the most significant food commodities supplied by Duplin County.[10] Duplin County has been recognized both nationally and internationally for its agriculture products. Quite remarkably, over 1/6 of the world's population food supply is provided by Duplin County and its adjacent county, Sampson County that was once the western portion of Duplin County before the division in 1784. Similarly, with other outstanding rankings, Duplin County ranked second in corn for grain, first in turkey production and processing with top ten in broilers and top ten in tobacco, sweet potatoes, and wheat.[11]

Additionally, Duplin County is noted for a substantial production of textiles and manufacturing, along with its agricultural and livestock. Many corporations and industries supply items include acrylic, synthetic, and chenille yarns and automotive textiles. The wine business has expanded with its wine making and bottling.[12]

Data from the 2010 Census Report highlight the population of Duplin County as being 54,388 individuals. Since 2000, there has been a growth spurt from serving 49,000 people to the present level of just over 54,000. Several factors probably influence this

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[10] "Discover Duplin County History," accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.duplincountync.com/aboutDuplinCounty/history.html.

[11] "Discover Duplin County History," accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.duplincountync.com/aboutDuplinCounty/history.html.

[12] "Discover Duplin County History," accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.duplincountync.com/aboutDuplinCounty/history.html.

population growth, such as Duplin County's low tax rate, the moderate climate, and the reasonably accessible proximity of Duplin County to five military bases.[13]

Earlier reports of the Census Bureau, 2005-2009 American Community Survey Five-Year Estimates reflect interesting statistics of the Duplin County populations. Information was revealed on the percentages and numbers of the 9,663 senior populations from the total 52,358 Duplin County populations. With both men and women together, there exist age categories, population number, and percentages during this period. The category fifty-five to fifty-nine years, the population was 3,800 (6.5%); for the sixty to sixty-four years, it was 3,490 (6.0%); for the sixty-five to sixty-nine years, it was 2,631 (4.5%); for seventy to seventy-four years, the population was 2,055 (3.5%); for the seventy-five to seventy-nine years, it was 1,611 (2.8%); for the eighty to eighty-four years, it was 1,105 (1.9%); and for eighty-five years and over, the population was 893 (1.5%).[14]

Further with the 2005-2009 Survey, facts were shown on the ethnic and race groups. Data indicated the following: Whites composed around 58%; Black or African Americans were around 25.8%; American Indian and Alaska Native consisted nearly 0.1%; Asia were close to 0.2%; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander were 0.1%; some other race included 14.8%; two or more races consisted of 1.0%; and Hispanic or Latino origin (of any race) made up 20.5%.[15]

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[13] "2011 State of the County Health Report," Duplin County Health Department, accessed December 12, 2015, http://www.duplincountync.com/pdfs/state%20of%20the%20county%202011.pdf?c=031.

[14] "2005-2009 American Community Survey," U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/37061.

[15] "2005-2009 American Community Survey," U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/37061.

Of household types, the survey provided informative statistics. The married-couple family was 46.9%. Female householder with no husband present recorded 14.2%, and households living alone were 28.2%. Additionally, for populations fifteen years and older, the marital status included: now married, except separate was 45.7%; widowed revealed 8.0%; divorced consisted of 9.7%; separated was 3.9%; and never married indicated 32.6%. Marital status for Duplin County's population over fifteen years was reported as the following: now married, except separated was 45.7%, for widowed, it included 8.0%; for divorced, it was 9.75%; those separated, it was 3.9%; and never married, it consisted of 32.6%.[16]

The findings pertaining to education are very interesting for Duplin County. Educational attainment for Duplin County's population from the Survey of those over twenty-five years of age existed in several categories. They presented the following percentages: not a high school graduate was 32%; high school graduate, alternative, or GED comprised 31.5%; associate's degree or some college was 26.3%; and for those having a Bachelor's degree or higher, the percentage was 9.9%.[17]

The employment status for persons over sixteen years of age and over (48,277), as well as sixty years and older (9,663) provided some strikingly noticeable data for the Duplin County population. Data was reported from three of their categories. For the labor force, it was 61.3% versus (over 60 at 22.7%); for the unemployed, it was 4.5%

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[16] "2005-2009 American Community Survey," U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/37061.

[17] "2005-2009 American Community Survey," U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/37061

versus (over sixty years at 0.6%); and those not in labor force was reported at 38.7%

versus (over sixty years at 77.3%).[18]

Income recordings for the 2009 section of Duplin County households included:

households with earnings have a 74.2% (the mean earnings of $47,024); those with social

security income have a 33.8% (a mean earnings of $12,450); and others with

supplemental social security have a 6.6% (a mean earnings of $6,518). Some other

inclusions were with cash public assistance income having a 2.1% (a mean earnings of

$4,704); and those with retirement income have an 18.1% (a mean earnings of $13,868).

Individuals with Food Stamp/SNAP benefits have an 11.6%.[19]

Also, the 2005-2009 Survey recorded specific income amount for households.

Those earning less than $10,000.00 were 11.9%; the $15,000 to $14,999 group was

10.8%; the $15,000 to $24,000 comprised 15.8%; those in the $25,000 to $34,999 group

were 13.3; the $35,000 to 49,999 category was 16.8%; those in the $50,000 to $74,999

were 15.2%; and the $75,000 to $99,999 was 8.4%; the $100,000 to $149,999 was 6.1%.

Interestingly, those in the $150,000 to $199,999 group were 0.7% and those $200,000 or

more were 1.1%.[20]

Quite noteworthy, the early settlers of Duplin County were religiously identified

as primarily Presbyterians. This Goshen congregation in Duplin County was established

in 1736, and later it was referred to as Grove congregation. In fact, it was recorded as the

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[18] "2005-2009 American Community Survey," U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/37061.

[19] "2005-2009 American Community Survey," U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/37061.

[20] "2005-2009 American Community Survey," U.S. Bureau of the Census, accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.census.gov/quickfacts/table/PST045215/37061.

first Presbyterian Church in North Carolina. Currently, it is still continuously active with members.[21] Today, Duplin County proudly emphasizes that it has numerous churches of various religious affiliations. These include: Methodist, Baptist, Pentecostal, Jewish, Catholic, Missionary, and Presbyterian, along with countless others.[22]

Within the past twenty-five years, the mailing address of Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church changed to Teachey, North Carolina due to the postal service arrangement system. Teachey, North Carolina is the adjacent town to Wallace, but much smaller, a population of 291. This town was originally known as Teacheys Depot for the Teachey boarding house, and it was located along the Wilmington and Weldon Railroad. It was incorporated in 1874 as Teacheys. Most notably in 1849, former President James K. Polk stopped and had breakfast at the Teachey boarding house.[23]

Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church in Teachey, North Carolina has a very prestigious history. This church was built in 1878, approximately 132 years ago, shortly after the closing of the Civil War. The initial Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church establishment was quite humble and crude in its structure and appearance. However, it was tremendously impressive to its dedicated congregation.[24] The congregation is entirely African American, but a few whites and Hispanics occasionally visit and participate in church services.

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[21] "Discover Duplin County History," accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.duplincountync.com/aboutDuplinCounty/history.html.

[22] "Discover Duplin County History," accessed October 21, 2011, http://www.duplincountync.com/aboutDuplinCounty/history.html.

[23] Ruby Ramsey, "Town of Teachey," Unpublished Document, Teachey, NC, 1954.

[24] Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church, "Church Anniversary Celebration," November 28, 2010.

Throughout the years, the Rockfish African Methodist Church outstandingly developed both in its strikingly noticeable structural appearance and its church attendance. Church services were held only on the fourth Sunday of each month with a remarkable attendance rate of mixed denominations between 300 to 400 individuals for a rural country church. Therefore, the Rockfish African Episcopal Church members experienced the opportunity to visit the other churches from a variety of denominations within and outside the community of Wallace and Teachey, North Carolina. This process of congregational visitation was reciprocated on the fourth Sundays at Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Furthermore, many other denominational churches were located miles away from the Rockfish community, and their members infrequently attended their churches. Therefore, they would faithfully attend Rockfish African Methodist Church on the fourth Sunday of each month. This extraordinarily enormous gathering of persons from various denominations coming to worship God in this rural area tended to heighten the fourth Sunday congregational attendance rate to several hundred, well-over 300 in the mid 1900's. Some would sit outside and listen through the open church windows.

This type astonishing church attendance in a rural area, not in a major city was most phenomenal. The Rockfish community, in general, considered Rockfish African Methodist Church to be the representative within the surrounding community to assist with overall prevailing issues and concerns. For decades, this church was the pivotal establishment within the Rockfish community to render needed services to the community-at-large: elderly, adults, young adults, and children.

Definitely, Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church was indicative of the type of institution Richard Allen had in mind. As the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1787, he purported the interrelatedness of the belief in God, Jesus Christ as the Redeemer, and the bonding of brotherhood with integrity and respect between the church and the total community within society.[25] Agreeably by the visibility of its attendees, Rockfish AME Church embodied the prestigious spirit of Richard Allen.

Over the past century, Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church has basically been a family-oriented church for its church members since its inception. Until recently, its leadership and its prestigious position within the community have been unparalleled in its membership attendance and Christian contributions to the church and community at large. Around twenty-five years ago, this prestigious church with a legacy to render church services to well-over 300 church members and visitors on the fourth Sundays, has now declined with its population to approximately fifty to eighty individuals each Sunday. Several plausible factors may be addressed to account for some of these pronounced changes with attendance decline.

During the Second Episcopal District Conference 1983-1984, Rockfish African Episcopal Church was made into a Station Church. Now, church services began to be held each Sunday in the month, as opposed to only the fourth Sunday.[26] At the same time, other denominations began building churches within the Wallace and Teachey, North Carolina area. These local churches could now accommodate their members.

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[25] Andrew Nathaniel White, *Know Your Church Manual: An Introductory Study of the Local Church for Officers and Members* (Nashville, TN: Division of Christian Education, African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1965).

[26] Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church, "Church Anniversary Celebration: 1878-2010," November 28, 2010.

In particular, these occurrences, coupled with other variables, have directly or indirectly drastically impacted the Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal congregational attendance rate. Concomitantly, several other factors have apparently contributed to the plummeting level of attendance at Rockfish AME Church. For example, there has been the development of various accessible modes of transportation which encouraged the community population to engage in church visitation outside the boundaries of the Wallace and Teachey area. Next, many children and grandchildren of the present members relocated due to jobs, marriages, and school, but have not returned.

Also, within the Rockfish community, there has been an increase in crime, especially drug related incidents.[27] Since Rockfish AME Church is situated in an isolated area of the street with few houses and businesses, it appears unsafe, especially for afternoon and evening programs. Possibly, its location may be considered a determinant to further reduce the level of church attendance for many individuals, including adults and children.

Therefore, it is of utmost importance that Rockfish AME Church identifies and seeks wholesome avenues to reconnect its church members with families and children, while increasing church attendance. Additionally, safety and security procedures, equipment, and devices must be sought to assure the congregation that updated precautions and structural safety features have been constructed to promote safety. The Rockfish AME Church environment and its surroundings adjacent to the church must provide physical, as well as spiritual, emotional, and mental safety, security, and comfort.

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[27] Wallace Police Department, "Activity Event Summary (Totals): (01/01/2006 – 12/31/2010)," 2011.

To pursue this goal, it is imperative for Rockfish AME Church members to harmoniously engage in a church model that has the capabilities to design and implement Christian tenets that will embrace the support for families in crisis. Church members must assist families by providing the necessary and sufficient resources for them to effectively combat the family crisis that have engulfed them from the various injustices, inequalities, and oppressions they encounter and endure on a daily basis. Further, church doctrines must endorse the benevolent notion that church and family are interrelated. With this in mind, unity among all church members, young and old, must become the beacon of hope for the survival of both church and families, including children.

In ascertaining the impact of this project for Rockfish AME Church, it becomes quite evident that the church family inside and outside the church will become motivated to seek and accept options that will unite all church members. Such action will inspire the reconnection of families and children to church life. They will engage in positive alternatives that will encourage the mutual inclusion of families, youth, and God's children from the community into the church family with Christian fellowship by utilizing wisdom and hospitality. The older church members will welcome the opportunity of training and instructing the young on meaningful Christian doctrines that have the Christian applicability to align diverse facets in our global society as Jesus exhibited while walking on earth and teaching the gospel to men and women of diverse backgrounds in biblical times.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Church unity is attained with more enthusiasm and acceptance within its congregation when members utilize wisdom and hospitality in receiving and training children. While investigating the impact of wisdom and hospitality on building church unity, especially involving children, it is imperative to critique appropriate passages from the Bible. They should illustrate models that depict the importance of using wisdom and hospitability in training and receiving children as the chosen ones for God's Kingdom. In this chapter, a comprehensive examination will be comprised of two relevant scriptures: one from the Old Testament and the New Testament. The scriptures will provide the text and fundamental underpinnings of this research project.

To satisfy the varied functions, services, and rituals performed in the church, its members should consider viable options within the congregation to fulfill these church responsibilities and duties in a unified manner to include both adults and children. In fact, church unity denotes "oneness" and expresses solidarity and congruence among its members. When God's creations (adults and children) work together in a harmonious fashion, it demonstrates solidarity and unity.

This can easily occur if God's people would remember the "days of old" when families had to work together in a sharing "oneness." During those times, families employed a cooperative environment for the good of the whole: family and community

collectively working together to ultimately ensure survival of all. By building church unity through wisdom and hospitality, it will become readily apparent within the entire congregation that there are multiple benefits in receiving and training children for God's Kingdom. More specifically, unity is characterized as "…the totality of that which is diverse and varied. It is the oneness that does not obliterate what is distinctive about its members. Unity does not mean uniformity, but solidarity."[1]

The Old Testament scripture is Proverbs 22:6 and the New Testament scripture is Mark 10: 13-16.[2] These verses will support this research project on building church unity with adults and children. Both will focus on the marvelous applicability of God's intent to recognize and accept children with hospitality, to train them through wisdom, and to publically select them as the chosen gifts for the Kingdom of God.

Throughout Proverbs 22 and Mark 10, several germane focal points will be addressed to ensure clarity and continuity. These include: history and context of the scriptures, authorship, and an exegesis of the two periscopes. A rigorous effort will be made to present relevant themes and clusters, coupled with isolated pertinent insertions. In a responsible manner, generalizations and implications of information will be presented from Proverbs 22 and Mark 10 pertaining to modern everyday life. The intentions of this sequence of information is to emphasize the utmost importance of utilizing wisdom and hospitality when receiving and training children, especially in the church, as well as the global society.

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[1] David Noel, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 746.

[2] Michael D. Coogan*, The New Oxford Annotated Bible* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

With each step of this process, Walter Brueggemann's cautiousness will be strictly adhered to in acknowledging the notion that the Bible's interpretation embodies imaginations of others from different cultures and venues. This phenomenon occurs in conjunction with the counter-imaginations of additional persons that are spirit-led in their interpretations, too, of the Bible. Eventually, this process will lead to an ongoing stream of interpretations on numerous and diverse imaginations of the text for so many others who follow.[3]

Old Testament Scripture

According to Proverbs 22:6, it states that one should "Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray."[4] Historically, the Old Testament came into existence approximately the last quarter of the thirteenth century under Rameses II and Joshua's conquest.[5] This highlights the era of oppression with Israel and their exodus from Egypt.[6] The Holy Land was comprised of Europe and North Africa with a distant corner of the Mediterranean. Interestingly, The Holy Land was recognized as having two names: Canaan and Palestine. The Greek connotation of Palestine came from "*Philistia*," the word bearing the name of its inhabitants, the Philistines. Whereas, Canaan is derived from "*red –Tyrion purple;*" this was the popular color of a dye from that area which was

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[3] Walter Bruggemann**,** "An Overview of the Old Testament" (lecture, Saint Thomas Church, 2012), accessed November 15, 2014.

[4] Coogan*, The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 922.

[5] Herbert G. May and John Day, eds., *Oxford Bible Atlas*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1985), 60-61.

[6] May and Day, *Oxford Bible Atlas*, 16.

used and exported with traders and merchants that helped promote revenue for the economy.[7]

It is noteworthy to mention that Proverbs of the Old Testament are considered a compilation of collections consisting of various folk wisdoms that were probably generated from an oral culture throughout generations. Eventually in the pre-exilic period, these folk wisdoms were allegedly written down either in Solomon's court (tenth century) or in Hezekiah's reign (sixth and seventh century), perhaps by sages or scribes.[8] For centuries, the authorship of Proverbs undoubtedly were attributed to Solomon, especially with his prominent widespread composition of countless passages and documents. However, a barrage of criticisms emerged since 1953 concerning the authorship of Proverbs. Seemingly, information was discovered in a British museum to dispute Solomon's claim to authorship for specific chapters and verses of Proverbs.

Whether Solomon, Hezekiah, a scribe, or an anonymous source is the actual culprit of this catastrophic situation over Proverbs' authorship, it is reasonably certain that the torch of questionability has been lit. Consequently, the flames will continue to ignite ongoing skepticism on the authorship of Proverbs. Agreeably, since the magnificent Solomon has been outstandingly credited with the speaking and writing of at least three thousand Proverbs, coupled with numerous other compositions, Roy B. Chamberlin and Herman Feldman contend that it is highly plausible that the entire compilation of Proverbs would have been attributed to Solomon without any hesitation.[9]

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[7] May and Day, *Oxford Bible Atlas,* 9.

[8] Coogan*, The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 895.

[9] Roy B. Chamberlin and Herman Feldman, *The Wisdom Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1950), 394.

In particular, as Solomon reigned in the tenth century, he was very fortunate, for he had previously found favor with God in his youth. Solomon had made an earnest request to God in a dream for wisdom. Solomon readily confessed that he was a young and unskilled leader. As God's servant, Solomon genuinely requested from God the gift of an understanding mind to govern the people, giving him the wisdom to discern between good and evil.[10] With much satisfaction, God fulfilled Solomon's request by giving him the wisdom to differentiate between good and evil.

Therefore, for Solomon, wisdom underscored and highlighted his reign. Wisdom is a derivative of a Hebrew word "*hkm*" frequently seen as "*chokmah*." When using "*chokmah*," the tendency is to combine understanding and skill as the intended definition.[11] However, Frederick C. Eiselen passionately expresses the view that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.[12] Whereas, Raymond Brown contends that "… wisdom is the protection from evil people…; the ultimate goal of wisdom is goodness and justice; the reward is continued life in the land."[13]

According to Joan Comay, it is categorically stated within the Bible that the wisdom possessed by Solomon surpassed, and by far, excelled all others in the lands, including Egypt.[14] Perhaps, this is an opportune time to engage in dialogue on the

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[10] Joan Comay, *Who's Who in Old Testament* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 321.

[11] David Noel Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 920.

[12] Frederick C. Eiselen, *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* (New York, NY: Abingdon Press, Inc., 1929), 603.

[13] Raymond Brown, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentaries* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prince Hall, 1990), 456.

[14] Comay, *Who's Who in Old Testament*, 321.

landmark case that proclaimed the apex of Solomon's wisdom involving the two

prostitutes and the baby. These two prostitutes shared living quarters, and recently both

had newborn sons. One mother's son died, while the other mother's son lived. However,

both mothers demanded to be the mother of the living son.

To resolve the conflict, Solomon ordered a sword to be brought to him to cut the

baby in two, and he would give half to each woman. At that moment, one woman cried

out for Solomon to give the baby to the other woman and not slay him. Immediately, the

other woman vehemently declared that it should neither be mine nor hers and insisted to

divide the baby in half. Solomon deduced with wisdom that the first woman who

rejected the idea of cutting the baby in half was the real mother, and the baby was given

to her. This case illustrated the pinnacle of his wisdom, giving him impressive fame to be

foretold throughout generations.[15]

With greater insight on the inception of wisdom, the focus must be directed on the

primary purpose of this chapter, which is to launch an examination of Proverbs 22,

specifically verse six. The examination will assist with ascertaining critical information

that will provide evidence to evaluate its applicability to wisdom and hospitality in

building church unity when receiving and training children. Basically, Proverb 22:6

clearly states that children should be trained in a righteous manner to obey God's laws at

an early age in order that they will not depart and stray from the righteous path when old.

Further, the aim of Proverbs 22: 6 conveys the notion that children are very

vulnerable and impressionable. They are gifts and blessings from God.[16] At this early

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[15] Comay, *Who's Who in Old Testament,* 321.

[16] Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, 904-905.

phase, one may discern that, initially, the minds and bodies of children are free from the contaminants of the vicious evils throughout the world. Essentially, at this level their thoughts, attitudes, and actions have not been tainted and polluted with the corruptions of worldly values and false beliefs. Simply, children are inquisitive and view the world as God desired, which is to love God and God's amazing creations.

This clinical mindset of children embraces the notion that they are receptive to Christian guidance from seasoned senior saints of the church. Such a relationship of learning with motivation and nurturance can provide fertile ground for mutual Christian exchange between adults and children. Since Proverb 22: 6 does not specify who should be in charge of the training, one may be prone to entertain the notion that God is holding all adults accountable for teaching and instructing children in a righteous manner. Then, if such be the case, children must be taught by responsible and nurturing parents, and adults should become knowledgeable on the proper utilization of wisdom before imparting this valuable information to children.

Therefore, children will possess the skills to differentiate appropriate and godly selection of choices throughout their daily lives. Wisdom will guide them in making righteous decisions to avoid dangers and catastrophes. Ultimately, this gives hope for children's righteous upbringing in their, sometimes, insidious world of today and tomorrow. Then, when children are old, if they do depart, hopefully, they will return to the righteous way of God's wisdom from early teachings and instructions.[17] Intuitively, the general consensus is that children's minds are malleable and impressionable, making

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[17] Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publisher, Inc., 2008), 3.

teachings and instructions on God's words of wisdom more easily etched and engraved on their thinking patterns.

Ironically, Proverb 22: 6 does not articulate the tenets of training for children, only the advice to train children. Seemingly, the author of Proverbs 22 is assuming that parents and adults will have the intelligence and capabilities to understand and to use the content from the information obtained in verses above and below verse six. These verses before and after Proverbs 22: 6 contain very essential instructions and teachings of wisdom to guide children in making daily choices in life. Of course, children must be taught these rules in order to avoid adversities and calamities in life. Perhaps, this omission in verse six was an oversight. Nevertheless, if children are to be properly trained, adults and parents must have the ability to extrapolate the wisdom from the other verses of Proverb 22 in order to abide by the command of Proverbs 22: 6.

As aforementioned, the author of Proverbs 22:6 failed to state who would conduct the training for children. Therefore, the most feasible assumption might be to conclude that both parents and all adults be held accountable by God in this training process with wisdom. However, there is a dire need for adults and parents in today's society, especially within the church, to graciously accept this responsibility and accountability of training children with wisdom, while receiving them in a hospitable manner.

Since Proverbs 22: 6 is virtually self-explanatory, some commentaries and annotated Bibles avoid altogether entering any information on explaining this verse.[18] Technically, Proverb 22: 6 could be placed in any section of the passage because it is a very independent verse in relationship to the other verses in Proverbs 22. Simply, Proverb

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[18] Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 922.

22: 6 could randomly occur in the beginning, middle, or the end of the scripture; this verse would still reveal the exact information pertaining to advice on wisdom for adults and parents to follow in training children.

At a glance, the first verses of Proverbs 22:1-16 are brilliantly expressed in two-line writings using wisdom to warn individuals, especially for instructing children. These verses appear carefully designed with their consistency of advice on wisdom. Presumably, the indication is that they will be an appropriate rubric for children on how to avoid danger and deleterious circumstances by choosing a righteous lifestyle to follow daily. Specific dichotomies are presented for the wise to choose such as a good name versus riches and prudence over simple. Interspersed throughout many of the verses are themes of desirable actions that may be selected through wisdom, such as fearing the Lord, pureness of heart, a good name, sharing with others, and prudence.[19]

In particular, according to Christopher D. Hudson, verse one is dedicated to the integrity that must be within oneself to understand and choose a good reputation and name over riches and other worldly treasures.[20] Essentially, by introducing and conscientiously exposing Christian training to children at this level, adults and parents give children an advantage by equipping them with Christian armor. This protective covering consists of integrity laced with wisdom to protect them throughout old age. Children will be supplied with teachings and instructions on God's laws and expectations to prepare for the Kingdom of God.

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[19] Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 922.

[20] Christopher D. Hudson, *The Layman's Concise Bible Commentary* (Uhrichsville, OH: Barbour Publishing, Inc., 2013), 213.

Consequently, with these early trainings, children will acquire the resiliency to combat evil; therefore, they will have a tendency to refrain from straying away and will continue on the righteous path of God's rule when they are old. If they do fall and regress from God's path, children will still possess within themselves, from previous teachings, the wisdom for making righteous choices as declared by Matthew Henry.[21] This lends hope that children who unfortunately stray will one day return to the indelible imprints of wisdom received as a child and will realign themselves to the righteous path of following God's word and performing God's work.

Similarly insightful to the reader is verse two with its applicability to all ages, genders, ethnic groups, religious denominations, and any other entities or groupings. This prominent verse of wisdom denotes paramount importance, especially to the teaching and instruction of children. The significance of this verse assists them with understanding their worth in life as images of God. It proclaims the interrelationship of the poor and the rich through a major commonality: God is the Maker of both poor and rich. Therefore, according to God, no child nor adult is superior or inferior to another. This is why it is so appalling in some sectors within today's communities when children are perceived in a lesser role than adults, especially within some churches.

Whenever inhospitable treatment of children occur in some churches within modern society, it tends to ignite condescending actions that may greatly hinder church unity. The inclusion of children by utilizing wisdom and hospitality to enhance church unity will give credence to the acknowledgement that God is the Maker of all; therefore, no one is lesser or inferior to the other. Further, Christopher D. Hudson elaborates on

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[21] Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 3.

verse two by reminding the reader that God grants love to all: both poor and rich. Essentially, Hudson emphatically states that God does not look at bank accounts when God bestows love and blessings. [22]

Therefore, if any Christian believes in Christ and has received redemption as a gift, then such a Christian must accept everyone as being of equal status and God as the Maker of all groups. This is a major criterion in order to enter the Kingdom of God. To reiterate, not any group is lesser or greater than another in God's eyes. Furthermore, as God the Maker, all allegiance and all thanks must be owed to God.[23]

Additionally, verse four conveys to the reader that children need to know that "… the reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life."[24] In essence, children, in particular, are lacking in knowledge of the Lord, fear of the Lord, and understanding of the multitude of blessings God has bestowed upon them. Seemingly, parents and adults are not without guilt on this lack of knowledge about God and disseminating it to children.

Indeed, parents and adults are held accountable in teaching children the customs, history, and the mandates of the culture from the old ways as outlined in the Old Testament. This duty will nurture and perpetuate the knowledge of the Lord. Accordingly, parents and adults must inform children of the prominent benchmarks and milestones that guided and protected the generations from the past. To reiterate, adults must appropriately train and teach children to remember the ancient landmarks past down

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[22] Hudson, *The Layman's Concise Bible Commentary*, 213.

[23] Balmer H. Kelly, *The Layman's Bible Commentary* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1962), 13.

[24] Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 922.

from their ancestors. Verse twenty-eight speaks to this necessity of survival skills:

"…Do not remove the ancient landmark that your ancestors set up."[25]

However, of late, God's inclinations of selecting children and youth in pivotal

roles in God's divine mission and righteous guidelines with wisdom usage for everyday

life have gone awry, even in churches. Apparently, the Christian worldview of today has

lost sight of children being involved and carrying out God's laws to seek the Kingdom of

God. So many throughout the communities and churches have forgotten the zealously

revered and sacred aforementioned passages from the Old Testament. Seemingly, parents

and adults have lost God's explicit references for training, instructing, and using children

through wisdom with hospitality to deliver God's message. With deepest regrets for

children, the parents and adults have ubiquitously erased their ancient landmarks of

wisdom and are not "listening with their hearts" as did Solomon.[26]

With such an omission of training for children from parents and adults, Walter

Brueggemann espouses on the notion of "pedagogy of saturation" to rectify this

knowledge-deficit dilemma.[27] This phenomenon is used primarily to prevent or eradicate

the uncaring and selfish emergence of spiritual extinction. Its definition is characterized

by the lack of parental and adult authority for administering instructions and teachings

about the magnificent wonders of God throughout multi-generations over time.

Crucial information must be vigilantly well-maintained and diligently transmitted

to descendants from their ancestors for ongoing preservation throughout generations and

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[25] Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 923.

[26] Comay, *Who's Who in Old Testament,* 321.

[27] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of The Old Testament* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), 722.

generations. If not, a spiritual extinction could emerge.[28] Once spiritual extinction occurs, generations of children will lack any knowledge about God, including God's role in humanity's existence. Then, the generations become easily accessible to worshipping false gods, creating a disconnection from the Supreme Maker, God.

By parents and adults not engaging in the appropriate training and instructions of wisdom to their children, the children are left in an unrighteous and dismal state by not knowing the goodness of the Lord. Not only is this an accurate scenario of many churches today, but this was the case with Israel.[29] After God had rescued the Israelites and bestowed blessings upon them, they soon forgot about God's goodness, becoming callous and ungrateful, while showing little or no allegiance to God. They discontinued the training and instructions of wisdom to their children from the past. The generations began to forget God's word, including the pertinent knowledge that God is the Divine Maker of all.

Apparently, in ancient times with the dissipating memories of God's word and the knowledge that God is the Maker of all, Israel began crashing into a spiritual extinction. To reconnect children to information about the Lord and God's expectations, adults and parents designed and implemented elaborate feasts, known as "pedagogy of saturation."[30] These feasts of celebration were held in conspicuous ceremonies. Outlandish visual exhibits and audacious verbal strategies were utilized to provide instructions and

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[28] Brueggemann, *Theology of The Old Testament*, 722.
[29] Brueggemann, *Theology of The Old Testament*, 722.

[30] Brueggemann, *Theology of The Old Testament*, 722.

teachings in the temples and tabernacles to convey and emphasize the messages of God to all, both adults and children.[31]

Repeatedly, these colossal events were held and displayed with strategies for learning numerous instructions and teachings of wisdom. This abundantly well-saturated amount of instructions on knowledge about God's word and God's work would supposedly become engraved into the minds of the people, especially the children. As aforementioned, the clinical mindset of children with the yearning and receptivity of God's word must be nurtured by the seasoned senior saints. Evidently, in some sectors of today's society, spiritual extinction has occurred, especially involving many children within the family and churches. However, sadly, "pedagogy of saturation" is not being provided by many churches, parents, and adults as a remedy for this spiritually ill-prepared society of children.

Also, noted with Proverbs is that the twenty-second chapter demonstrates a concern with the sequence style. Seemingly, there is not a unified sequential pattern in which the verses are laid out. Some verses are arbitrarily placed in conjunction with each other. Agreeably, Raymond E. Brown recognizes Proverbs, in general, as being presented as discrete entities that have been intentionally or otherwise gathered and placed in a random collection. He further cites that Proverbs give the illusion of being easy to understand, yet, they tend to portray more in depth connotations and profound insights.[32]

Definitely, such depth and profoundness is a reoccurring theme throughout the chapter. One must delve into each verse to understand the meaning of the analogies

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[31] Brueggemann, *Theology of The Old Testament*, 722.
[32] Raymond E. Brown, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentaries* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prince Hall, 1990), 454.

demonstrating wisdom in making the right choices in life to ensure the avoidance of misfortune and corruption. However, in contrast, there are some who perceive this notion as an anomaly.[33] By avoiding the undesirables, corruptions, and misfortunes in life, it is insinuated that one may easily become insensitive to calamities and hardships of others. Simply, if or when, one continuously denies the existence of adversities and hurts in life, or merely avoids them, a myriad of injustices, especially to others, may occur.

Further, colossal levels of insensitivity to wrongness inflicted upon others and oblivion to gross injustices of many may eventually emerge. Such callous thinking and behaviors developed from the avoidance of catastrophic predicaments have the potential of unforeseen dangers. One can easily develop or create intolerance of victims with misfortunate, even if they have faithfully practiced using wisdom, but to no avail.

Then, due to this insensitivity, one becomes comfortable with the mistreated, poor, and oppressed. In today's economy, one frequently observes in the media that some with opportunity and prosperity will harshly articulate the view that those individuals who do not work, nor contribute to the work sector of society, should not eat. Further, the oppressed, poor, and recipients of this horrific thought include: disabled, children, the elderly, homeless, jobless, the ill, and some retirees.

In a society of wealth, it is difficult to fathom that such insensitivity from the avoidance of deleterious conditions because of warnings derived from wisdom could manifest itself in deplorable acts of unkindness toward others, especially children. Yet, the insensitivity of an alarmingly overwhelming mass of persons do exist. Some do contend that this kind of behavior stems from avoidance of detrimental situations due to

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[33] Walter Brueggmann, *Old Testament Theology of Walter Brueggemann* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1992), 87-94.

the usage of wisdom. If this is the case, then this dismal situation is indicative of spiritual extinction. Therefore, such a systemic problem consistently broadens the denial throughout the world of hurts, discriminations, injustices, and wrongs that others may suffer on a daily basis.

Ironically, verse seven denotes the hierarchical relationship between the rich and poor and indicates, "The rich rule over the poor, and the borrower is the slave of the lender." Then, with Proverbs twenty-two, responsibility is placed upon the rich to care and be generous with the poor. This is expressed in verse nine as endorsed by God and stated that, "Those who are generous are blessed, for they share their bread with the poor." A similar assertion of wisdom is illustrated with a warning from God in verse sixteen,   "Oppressing the poor in order to enrich oneself, and giving to the rich, will lead only to loss." Indeed, children are advised of the duties, responsibility, and accountability through wisdom with dichotomies of rich and poor, as well as power versus oppression.[34]

Yet, for so many who desire to change their deleterious circumstances, but to no avail, they have become victims of oppression and poverty. This horrific lack of humanity for the poor and oppressed by the wealthy and powerful is continuously mounting; the deaf ear of the rich and wealthy has deepened. In today's society, the shrinking middle class is disappearing. Concomitant with this disruption is the gravity of the catastrophic vicious cycle of the poor, often children, that was once an anomaly is now becoming a daily reality for so many.

However, according to Bruce M. Metzger and Michael B. Coogan, the disproportion of wealth existing among Solomon and the other aristocrats, created a

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[34] Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 922.

cleavage between them and the remaining poor and oppressed subdivisions of that era.[35]

Similar claims in today's modern times are quite apparent and disheartening. The United

States has extensive prosperity and wealth, but small populaces of people are empowered

with the controlling power and opulent resources of wealth similar to the days of

Solomon's reign. Today, the majority of the population are less prosperous, consisting

largely of the shrinking middle class, poor, and oppressed who are pleading to rectify

issues: higher minimum wages, food supplements, an increase in quality jobs, better and

continued affordable health care, and increased shelter for the homeless, as well as care

for the veterans.

Returning to the dialogue on Proverbs and wisdom, Merrill C. Tenney posits a

noteworthy perspective of his overview of Proverbs, irrespective of the authorship. The

primary echoing theme is that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. Next, to

understand wisdom is to ardently accept wisdom as warnings against sin and evil.

Therefore, one must not confuse negative descriptions of behaviors and actions of

individuals as foolish, immature, or unwise, but instead, such actions and behaviors

should be thought of as expressions reflecting wickedness and sinfulness. In essence,

Proverbs should be considered and passionately revered as "Godly instructions, not

merely secular maxims."[36]

Furthermore, Merrill C. Tenney hastily contends that the usage of wisdom in

Proverbs, as with knowledge, understanding, and integrity should embody "holiness."[37]

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[35] Bruce M. Metzger, and Michael D. Coogan, *The Oxford Guide to People and Places of the Bible* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[36] Merrill C. Tenney, *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1967), 692.

[37] Tenney, *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible,* 692.

In sum, the endorsement of this connotation of wisdom, coupled with the aforementioned information ascertained from the exegesis of Proverbs the twenty second chapter, is focusing on verse six for training and guidance of those in need. This could greatly enhance the building of church unity. The greater probability of this view coming to fruition would be if the church members embraced the perspective that the survival of both the church and families, including children, is contingent upon church members utilizing Christian wisdom and hospitality to assist families and children in reconnecting to church life.

New Testament Scripture

According to Mark 10: 13-16,

> People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them.[38]

Historically, the New Testament commences around (37-4 B.C.) during the reign of Herod, shortly before the birth of Jesus. With Herod's reign, there was noticeable transformation of Jerusalem from basically an unpretentious, yet, populated religious area to one of the most attractive Roman provincial cities in the East.[39] The city of Rome was characterized as a prosperous empire in Italy with a lucrative financial and commercial foundation. Interestingly, Rome was described as a migrant city of over one million with

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[38] Coogan, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 1810.

[39] Herbert G. May, *Oxford Bible Atlas* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1984), 97.

its inhabitants being from a variety of cultures and religions. With this in mind, it is important to note that the Gospel according to Mark was written around the middle decades of the first century A.D. in the city of Rome, Italy.[40]

Within Mark 10: 13, the recognition that the parents and adults are bringing their children to Jesus in order that Jesus may touch them, as well as, bless them is indicative of the people's acceptance of Jesus as the Divine One with omnipotent powers to protect their children. It is quite striking that these children were not deformed nor described as having an illness; they were simply brought to Jesus in order that Jesus would touch them and bless their souls. It is suggested that the prayer was to protect them from harm, danger, and the evils of the world.

As it is purported in verse sixteen, the parents and adults wanted to receive a blessing for their children only from the hands of Jesus. Some writers have given credence to this notion. Clearly, Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy adamantly state that, "Those who brought the children were seeking a blessing from Jesus in the form of the imposition of hands. The children could have been of any age from infancy up to 12."[41]

Alexander MacLaren delightfully cites that such actions by parents should have been considered very natural, as they were experiencing an enthusiastically spiritual moment for them and their children with Jesus. Later, these parents would be able to reminisce and relate to their children that Christ's hand had been laid upon their heads,

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[40] Balmer H. Kelly, *The Layman's Bible Commentary* (Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1962), 8.

[41] Raymond E. Brown, Joseph A. Fitzmyer, and Roland E. Murphy, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 615.

and that they had been prayed for and blessed by Christ.[42] Agreeably, Bernhard Weiss

reports that "Mark narrates…another incident in which children were brought to Jesus so

that by touching the holy man they would receive a blessing for life."[43]

However, on the contrary, it is within this same verse thirteen that the disciples

responded with hostility to this outpouring of eagerness to meet Jesus as the parents and

adults attempted to present their children to Jesus. The disciples did not hesitate in

negatively approaching the crowd by sternly speaking to these adults with their children.

Indeed, they did not use wisdom, nor display hospitality toward these children with the

parents and adults. Apparently, the disciples anticipated dissuading them from having any

encounter with Jesus. This negative and degrading action by the disciples was a callous

and inhuman incident long to be remembered by all.

Many assumptions could be formulated as to disciples' repugnant reaction to the

crowd with the children. Due to the fact that Jesus had pressing issues to deal with at the

time, the children were not expected to interrupt or bother Jesus. Refraining interaction

with Jesus and the children was a mere act of protecting Jesus from so many insistent

adults and bothersome children. Another assumption was the desire to inform the crowd

of their unpleasant and unfriendly feelings toward children. Interestingly, Alexander

MacLaren displays a very concise view of his notions on the misconduct of the disciples:

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[42]Alexander MacLaren, *Alexander MacLaren's Exposition Of Holy Scripture*, accessed June 11, 2014, http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mac/mark-10.html.

[43] Bernhard Weiss, *A Commentary on the New Testament* (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1906), 329.

"They thought of this as an interruption disturbing the intercourse with Jesus. 'These children are always in the way, this is tiresome, etc.'" [44]

Emphatically, Leander E. Keck contends that ancient societies vastly lacked the romantic notions of goodness and innocence of children as current communities, for they considered children as "non-persons."[45] He further suggests the similarity of "non-person" in modern day U.S. society would include "homeless 'street people'…in under-developed nations, indigenous people." [46] Specifically, David N. Freedman passionately pens the irony of such conditions involving God's usage of favoring children since ancient times and conflicting thoughts and actions portrayed by the people. It was very common for the people to unquestionably proclaim that children exemplified immortality for them, indicating that the children would carry their name and blood throughout the generations. Yet, the people perceived, treated, and still considered the children to have the lowest status.[47]

Regardless of their reason(s), the disciples exhibited harsh, inhospitable, and unsympathetic demeanor toward the children. Thus, Jesus became keenly aware of the mistreatment and lack of hospitality imposed upon the children, along with the parents and adults. Jesus, in Mark 10: 14, was overwhelmingly displeased and reprimanded the disciples. Jesus was described as being indignant after becoming aware of the unpleasant and inhospitable conduct of the disciples toward the children brought by the adults and

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[44] Alexander MacLaren, *Alexander MacLaren's Exposition of Holy Scripture,* accessed June 11, 2014, http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mac/mark-10.html.
[45] Leander E. Keck*, The New Interpreter's Bible: A Commentary in Twelve Volumes* (Nashville, TN: Abington Press, 1995), 647.

[46] Keck, *The New Interpreter's Bible,* 647.

[47] David Noel Freedman, *Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1992), 904-905.

parents. The word "*indignant*" has the connotation of being angry, vexed, irate, and annoyed.

Jesus did not hesitate in rectifying the wrongdoing by the disciples. Within verses fourteen through fifteen, after Jesus's indignation toward the disciples for their lack of hospitality with the parents and adults bringing the children, Jesus displayed an enormous amount of gentleness and compassion in accepting the children. Then, in a strikingly kind and considerate manner, Jesus demonstrated outstandingly spiritual brilliancy in bestowing calmness among the children and crowd. With a charismatic and a Christ-like genteel demeanor, Jesus illustrated hospitable discourse and interactions among the children and the crowd. With so much empathy and kindheartedness, Jesus caringly stated, "Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly, I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

Much has been articulated on the actions of hospitality in the Bible without defining the actual word itself. Hospitality is derived from a Greek term "*xenia*," usually accompanied by the word "*xenos*," the Greek term meaning stranger.[48] Hospitality is also a derivative of the Greek word "*philoxenia;*" it is the act of graciously receiving a stranger or guest into social groups.[49] Travelers were welcomed and given provisions and protection for the duration of time they remained in that area by their host. Hospitality is considered to have a Latin derivative, "*hospitium*" from "*ho spes*" meaning both host and guest with similarity to the Greek implication of welcome. William Smith cites

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[48] Keck, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, 901.

[49] Freedman*, Anchor Bible Dictionary,* 299-301.

hospitality as being considered one of the chief virtues of the ancient world.

Respectfully, hospitality has been revered and embraced over time.[50]

At this juncture, it is so appropriate to expound on the characteristics of a child

that encouraged Jesus to ardently inform the disciples and the crowd of acquiring

childlike characteristics as a contingency to enter into the Kingdom of God. Alexander

Maclaren states that the child has a particular "adaptation to Christianity: dependence,

trust, simplicity, unconsciousness, and docility."[51] Similarly, Bernhard Weiss gives a

resonating view indicating that it is "the simplicity of a childlike feeling of his own

helplessness and trust in the Giver," that describes the quality that all must possess in

order to enter the Kingdom of God.[52]

With comparable enthusiasm, George Arthur Buttrick echoes the aspects of

receptivity and dependence of the child for describing those entitled to being received in

the Kingdom of God. Also, an opposing stance is declared by George Arthur Buttrick as

he readily expresses the notion of denouncing those not eligible for entering the kingdom

of God who are filled with "pride and self-righteousness in the mind."[53] Likewise,

Raymond E. Brown places much emphasis on the receptivity of children, for they lack

physical power and social and legal status. Therefore, children are more prone to possess

the capabilities of being appreciative of receiving gifts: "The kingdom must be received

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[50] William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary* (Canada: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1948), 254.

[51] Alexander MacLaren, *Alexander MacLaren's Exposition of Holy Scripture*, accessed June 11, 2014, http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mac/mark-10.html.

[52] Bernhard Weiss, *A Commentary on the New Testament* (New York, NY: Funk and Wagnalls Company, 1906), 330.

[53] George Arthur Buttrick, *Interpreter's Bible: The Holy Scriptures* (New York, NY: Abingdon Cokesbury Press, 1951), 800.

as a gift" without the reliance on human power or status, only God's power and gift.[54]

Truly, Jesus was presenting to the world, even for today's global society, the criteria for entering the Kingdom of God.

The Kingdom of God has an optimistic connotation of delivering hope and joyfulness to a multitude of believers in God's rule and law. Accompanied by this recognition is the emergence of the realization of justice and death.[55] By accepting that God is the Supreme Ruler and the Kingdom of God is available to everyone, people do not have to seek revenge or evil with evil. God will deliver the appropriate justice at the proper time.

In fact, the Kingdom of God is a derivative of the Greek culture "*Basileia tou theou*" with kingdom having three meanings: "… the realm over which a monarch reigns; …the people over whom he reigns; and…the actual reign or rule itself."[56] All three are found in the New Testament. References are made to the redeemed people as the Kingdom because they will be the ones who share God's reign.[57]

With Mark 10: 13-14, it is articulated that Jesus makes the selection of children as the chosen ones to enter the Kingdom of God. Secondly, the Kingdom of God denotes the actual realm whether present or future that God's reign will be experienced.[58] Various other passages within the scriptures emphasize that the Kingdom of God is associated

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[54] Raymond E. Brown, *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 617.

[55] Mircea Eliade, *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York, NY: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1987), 304.

[56] Tenney*, Zondervan's Pictorial Bible,* 466*.*

[57] Tenney, *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible,* 466.

[58] Tenney*, Zondervan's Pictorial Bible,* 466.

with the future realm and the returning of Christ. Here the righteous will be the chosen

ones to inherit the Kingdom. This future Kingdom of God will provide the entrance to all

who are righteous and seek the blessings of God for "eternal life of the Age to Come."[59]

Thirdly, the Kingdom of God is not merely an abstract thought and rule, but it is

dynamically God's reign and rule to absolutely defeat and destroy "*katargeo*." This force

depicts all the evils and enemies throughout the universe, including death. Those

receiving the Kingdom of God will be the redeemed sinners who seek God's Kingdom,

righteousness, and sovereign rule with humility in their lives.[60]

In contrast, John Drane supports the conception that the intended and more

frequently used word considered by Jesus and Jews to convey kingdom should be the

word, "*malkuth*." "*Malkuth*" embodies the meaning to accept God's standard and to

earnestly pursue living one's life in accordance with those specific Godly guidelines. In

contrast to some writers, John Drane postulates that the accurate name should be the

"*Kingship of God*," not the "*Kingdom of God*." Essentially, Kingship of God embraces

the compassionate, moral way and manner that God operates. Further, John Drane

exclaims that such a term encourages the expectations and Godly works that the chosen

people should be emulating on a daily basis.[61]

Regardless of the terminology pertaining to Kingdom of God, in Mark 10: 13-16,

Jesus uses children to portray the message on how to enter the Kingdom of God. In sum,

Robert J. Karris concisely purports that the Kingdom of God for all people is "established

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[59] Tenney, *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible,* 466.
[60] Tenney, *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible,* 466.

[61] John Drane, *Introducing the Bible* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 334.

in their hearts."[62] Accordingly, Alexander Maclaren suggests that "The spirit of the kingdom is that of immortal youth."[63]

To fully magnify this assertion, in verse sixteen, Jesus demonstrated the utmost "spiritual greatness," with the manifestation of wisdom and hospitality toward the children after the injustice and wrongness were imposed upon them by the disciples. It is noteworthy to mention that Jesus was never vexed and indignant because of personal affronts, but Jesus's anger was strikingly noticeable with unkind acts toward the children.[64] Jesus hastily rectified the humiliating and intimidating experience thrust upon the children. "And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them," Indeed, Jesus was displaying to the world that God is the Maker of all, including poor and rich, old and young.

It is readily apparent, as exclaimed by J. Vernon McGee that this incredible act of kindness and hospitality is unprecedented with Jesus as "Our Lord took the children up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them. He never did take anybody else up in His arms like that…He took the little children because they are the ones."[65] This amicable trait was illustrated by Jesus even though children were still considered as being inferior and occupying the lowest status of all in society.[66]

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[62] Robert J. Karris, *The Collegeville Bible Commentary* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 923.

[63] MacLaren, *Alexander MacLaren's Exposition,* accessed June 11, 2014, http://www.studylight.org/commentaries/mac/mark-10.html.

[64] George Arthur Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1951), 799.

[65] J. Vernon McGee, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, vol. 4 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1983), 204.

[66] Coogan, *The New Oxford,* 1810.

Unequivocally, Jesus demonstrated wisdom in selecting this incident with children to graciously illustrate the hospitable path on how to enter the Kingdom of God. Without a doubt, Jesus highlighted this teachable moment of utilizing both wisdom and hospitality in receiving children for all to emulate throughout generations and generations to come. In sum, with much jubilation and elation in unison, all must undeniably agree that Jesus' ministry was one of inclusiveness of everyone, not exclusiveness.[67]

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[67] Keck, *The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible,* 647.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

To remain aligned with the church model of reconnecting families and children to church life, it was incumbent upon the researcher to ascertain a compatible historical figure, event, or era to relate similar views. Though the historical arena is immense, the selection process became incredibly narrowed, for so few could qualify in satisfying the criteria for representing the underpinnings for the historical foundations of this model. The major determinants of the selection process were the myriad contributions of the renowned and prestigious Richard Allen that embodied the facets of the projected church model.

So often, it is impossible to fathom the maximum level of one's potential of growth for tomorrow, such as a monumental religious and inspirational leader as Richard Allen. In fact, this daunting task for Richard Allen is virtually inconceivable to accomplish without being cognizant of his past, regardless of its lows and ebbs or its elations and triumphs. As challenging as this might be, this is definitely the optimum path to follow in order to reveal his innumerable contributions utilized in reconnecting God's children of African American descent. Some, of course, have been intentional and others serendipitous, associated with the distinguished founder of the African American Episcopal Church, Richard Allen. The magnitude of the outstandingly significant accomplishments pioneered by Allen become more apparent with the examination of the

multifaceted aspects of this man's historical endeavors. These illuminate the possible

blueprint for race survival with the bonding of God's children of African American

descent, both free and slaves.[1]

Therefore, it is obligatory to announce that this chapter will launch an in depth

investigation to delineate the multitude of occurrences related with Allen's achievements.

Indeed, Allen's accomplishments left indelible imprints on the survival, protection, and

union of God's African American children and families. These occurrences were readily

apparent during this tumultuous era, including prior and throughout his lifetime, as well

as during, and after Allen's presentation on the stage of history.

Though a colossal amount of archival data are affiliated with Richard Allen, this

chapter will lend itself to expeditiously conveying research on two salient themes. The

first echoing theme throughout Richard Allen's life endeavors deals with connecting and

reconnecting God's children and families of African American descent. It is with the

second theme that one becomes amazingly captivated with Allen's ability to envision the

path of survival for African Americans essentially through God, economic stability, and

education.

These themes are generated through several pivotal episodes of Allen's life. These

include: slavery experiences and acceptance of Methodism, impact of St. George

Methodist Church and emergence of both African Free Society and New Bethel

Methodist Episcopal Church, African American produce boycott, recognition and

rejection of the colonization scheme of African Americans, and establishing higher

education institutions. Interspersed within these incidents, one will be able to discern the

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[1] Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labors*, 52.

usage of wisdom and hospitality by Richard Allen as powerful tools to assist with ascertaining his goals.

Richard Allen was born into slavery in 1760 and lived several years in slavery with his father, mother and three siblings on the property of the Chew household in Philadelphia.[2] As a businessman, Benjamin Chew was characterized as having a lucrative law profession practice. Charles Wesley purports that Allen's exposure to the professional visitors and their legal conversations at the Chew household would eventually become extremely advantageous to him. Later in life, it was presumed that Allen was able to prudently utilize such information from their legal jargon to question an unjust contract written involving the Free African Society Church and consequently save the church and his people.[3]

Charles Wesley cites the decline of finances within the Chew household that compelled Chew to sell Richard Allen and his entire family to another slave owner during the 1860's. Allen's family consisted of his father, mother, and four children.[4] Even during those times, it was remarkable that the family was sold as an entire family unit together. They were sold to the Stokeley Plantation near Dover, Delaware. Agreeably, E. Curtis Alexander provides summarizations indicating that this act was undoubtedly impressionable to Richard Allen, for his family unit was kept together. Though a kind gesture indeed, but it did not diminish the fact that the entire family was still in bondage

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[2] Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labors,* 1.

[3] Allen, *The Life, Experience, and Gospel Labors,* 61.

[4] Charles Wesley, Richard Allen, Apostle of Freedom (Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1935), 10.

without their freedom on the Stokeley Plantation, only the location had changed, not the circumstances.[5]

However, later, Carol V.R. George depicts a bleaker and more catastrophic picture of the family unit after the Allen family arrived on the Stokeley Plantation farm. Namely, Allen's mother had several other children, and she was considered a financial liability to Stokeley with the younger children. The young children, of course, were not productive at that age. Therefore, Allen's mother and several family members with the exception of Richard Allen in his early teens, a sister, and brother near his age were sold into slavery.[6]

Since records were not kept, there is no indication that Allen ever again had any contact with his mother and separated family as a result of this horrendous act of slavery. The paucity of information on Allen's reactions and feelings on the family separation reveals little. Perhaps, the painful separation from his mother and other family members was too emotionally excruciating and agonizing for Allen. Also, with being a young teen, this probably related to his inability to engage in dialogue on these hopeless and pessimistic circumstances that were inextricably interwoven into slavery.[7]

Slavery embodies the view that one person owned and is property of another person. Slaves had no rights and "were bought and sold like horses."[8] George Singleton asserts Richard Allen's simplistic, but poignant words on slavery as a horrific system by

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[5] E. Curtis Alexander, *Richard Allen* (New York, NY: First Printing, 1985), 39.

[6] Carol V.R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths: Richard Allen and the Rise of Independent Black Churches, 1760-1840* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1973), 23-25.

[7] Carol V.R. George, *Segregated Sabbaths*, 23-25.

[8] Thorndike, E. L. and Clarence L. Barnhart, *Thorndike & Barnhart Advanced Junior Dictionary,* (Atlanta, GA: Scott Foresman and Company, 1968), 760.

surmising it as a "bitter pill."[9] From this scanty reporting of Allen's dialogue on his

familial upheaval and disruption, it is plausible to presume that Allen was filled with

overwhelming melancholy and embitterment existing from the separation of his family.

Perhaps, this unforgettable deplorable situation with the selling and separation of his

mother and siblings became the impetus for his consistency and persistency of connecting

and reconnecting God's children of African American descent.

If so, it gives credence to the notion as to why Allen appeared overly zealous in

his desire to seek information and inspiration from the Methodist circuit preachers who

met secretly in the forest at night near the Stokeley Plantation. Allen found the scorching

Christian messages espoused by the Methodist preachers condemning slavery and those

slave owners partaking in this horrendous act of slavery to be very impressive.

Seemingly, their intent was to deliver forcefully provoking messages to awaken the

audience on the inherent horrors and evils of slavery. Perhaps, their mission was

accomplished, for it was through Methodism that Richard Allen was inspired and

converted to turn away from the life of sin and accept the doctrines of Methodism as

addressed by many of the circuit rider Methodist preachers.

The highly acclaimed John Wesley of England championed the tenets of

Methodism. Edward P. Wimberley enthusiastically narrates that John Wesley "Believed

slavery hindered and blocked human beings' relationship with God. It made it difficult

for those who enslaved others to trust in God who was the source of the enslaver's true

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[9] George A Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism: A Study of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, NY: Exposition Press, 1952), xviii, 112.

identity, worth, and dignity. It also made it difficult for those who were enslaved to feel close to God due to being enslaved by other human beings."[10]

Essentially, John Wesley perceived the economic system as being the culprit of maintaining the deplorable system of slavery and causing the slave owner and the enslaved person to both live in and lose their souls. Therefore, John Wesley vehemently postulated, "Because slavery destroyed the souls and happiness of two races of people, Wesley was convinced that this economic system had to be abolished."[11] For some blacks, such as Richard Allen, Methodism denoted a new way of thinking about God, self, and others. George A. Singleton cites that Methodism is characterized as a "… revolutionary movement that had as its main goal to reach the poor and neglected classes of people."[12] Simply, John Wesley's Methodism depicted "lofty ideals of holiness and Christian perfection."[13]

After pondering the insightfulness and compelling nature of Methodism to abolish slavery and save both the slave owner and the slave, Allen courageously, with much determination filled with wisdom, devised a plan to initiate the linkages to his freedom. With some apprehension, Allen began a very conspicuous work habit to impress Stokeley, the plantation owner. He purposefully performed his detailed duties beyond the regular satisfaction, and he thereby convinced Stokeley that a righteous change had consumed him to improve his work ethics.

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[10] Edward P. Wimberly, *No Shame in Wesley's Gospel*: *A Twenty-first Century Pastoral Theology* (Eugene, OR: An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011), 80.

[11] Manfred Marquardt, "Social Ethics in Methodist Tradition*," In T & T Clark Companion to Methodism*, edited by Charles Yrigoyen Jr. (New York, NY: T and T Clark International, 2010), 292-308.

[12] Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism*, xviii.

[13] Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism*, 5.

Indeed, this was true after Allen's extraordinary conversion to Methodism. Once this outstanding working pattern was established, Allen, with God's assurance of faith, undertook a brave stance. He invited Stokeley to a Methodist prayer meeting advocating abolition of slavery that was held in the forest. It must be appropriately noted that Allen's actions for engaging in this perilous incident could have resulted in severe corporal punishment, to be sold, or even death.

Apparently, Allen's most earnest desire from God was the hope that Stokeley would become spiritually engrossed with a Christian conversion after hearing a Methodist sermon against slavery. As Allen had humbly envisioned, Stokeley did become a convert. He began to comprehend the sinfulness and evilness of slavery, resulting in his openly inviting other religious Methodist leaders to his plantation farm.

Subsequently, from Allen's plan which was devised from wisdom through God's guidance, Stokeley surely made a Christian offer to Allen and his brother concerning their freedom from the bondage of slavery. Filled with remorse about slavery, Stokeley provided both Allen and his brother an option only in a slave's dream; Stokeley allowed them to work for a designated period and buy their freedom from him. It took five long grueling years to obtain the fruits of their labor, but Allen and his brother were determined and steadfast in their work ethics; they did purchase their freedom from Stokeley. With the pen of Carol V.R. George, Allen postulations are succinct on slavery and freedom, "But he recalled his feelings at the time when set down his memoirs as an old man: 'I had it often impressed upon my mind that I should one day enjoy my freedom for slavery is a bitter pill."[14]

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[14] George, *Segregated Sabbaths,* 28.

The complexity of being a slave, then a free man became a daunting scenario for Richard Allen. His life as a slave had not sufficiently prepared him to adequately deal with the demands within a mostly hostile and unfamiliar world "with no formal education and very little practical knowledge of marketable skills."[15] However, hard work with dignity would be the ensued path for success with Allen, for God as the Director and Comforter would give him strength. Allen generously knew this from being a slave. To remain a free man with integrity, Allen hurriedly grasped the concept that a primary criterion to survive after slavery, an African American must secure economic stability without delay.

Therefore, he contemplated and appropriately sieged ways to harness the skills he had acquired as a slave to buy his freedom in order to obtain gainful employment and live as a free man. Simply, Richard Allen used his intellectual aspirations to secure and maintain survival as a free man by seeking economic stability; he engaged in a plethora of jobs such as a woodcutter, brickyard work, salt wagon driver, and a circuit Methodist preacher as time permitted.[16] As time progressed, Allen became a financially wealthy individual from his industrious work adventures.

Eventually, life's journey directed Richard Allen back to Philadelphia where life had begun for him as a slave on the property of the Chew household. More specifically, he began preaching and exhorting at St. George Methodist Church. Seemingly, after the selling and the separation of his mother and siblings through the slavery system, concomitant with John Wesley's stance on Methodism espousing the horrors and sins of

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[15] George, *Segregated Sabbaths*, 29.

[16] Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 42-43.

slavery by the circuit Methodist preachers, the dye had been cast for Richard Allen to become a devout follower of Methodism. Definitely, Wesley's words of wisdom and hospitality for the poor, oppressed, and neglected continued to have a resonating impact for Richard Allen's life experiences as he preached on Methodism. "If thy heart be as my heart, then give me thy hand."[17]

With the influx of more African Americans attending St. George Methodist, the white population began to exhibit more obvious discomfort with their presence at church, especially in very conspicuous parts of the church. Soon, African Americans were being placed in various locations within the church from their previous seating arrangements. This disruption of seating patterns for African Americans was becoming increasingly conspicuous.

As reported by George A. Singleton, the African Americans were being requested to relocate in various obscure parts of the church, such as along the walls, at the back of the church, the outer fringes of the church, and allegedly in the galleries. The actual slaves were partitioned away from everyone with wooden walls with cutout eye holes only in designated areas of the church. Blacks were permitted to the Communion Table, only after the whites had been served.[18]

It was quite evident within the white sector that hospitality began to slowly and decisively dissipate from the white church Methodist members towards African Americans in St. George Methodist Episcopal Church. Seemingly, as allegedly reported in 1786, the African Americans were not in the sections of the church designated for

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[17].Singleton, *Segregated Sabbaths*, 111.

[18] Singleton, *Segregated Sabbaths*, 6-9.

them by the whites at St. George Methodist Episcopal Church. In conjunction with this command by the whites, it was alleged that African Americans were asked to move from that particular section of the church. However, to resist that request with much steadfastness, Rev. Absalom Jones insisted "Let us pray."[19]

Therefore, with much described physical force, Rev. Absalom Jones was pulled from his knees by the shoulders. Rev. Allen, Rev. Jones, and some other African American Methodists removed themselves from St. George Methodist Episcopal Church, vowing never to return to be part of their congregation. The description of the alleged incident spoke volumes to the plight of the African Americans attempting to serve God in a white Methodist church. George A. Singleton asserted that a black pastor was harshly interrupted from praying and physically removed in St. George Methodist Church.[20]

Kevin A. Miller contends that it is not always the evil to be feared on the outside of the church, but it is sometimes the evilness within the church among the actual church members that create the chaotic disruption and confusion.[21] Not only are some members attempting to dictate their own agendas for personal gains, but also some struggles and conflicts within the church are deliberately sinister from "mean-spirited members who think the old way is the only way."[22] Seemingly, this was the situation at St. George Methodist Church towards the black congregation.

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[19] Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 21.

[20] Singleton, *Segregated Sabbaths*, 6-20.

[21] Kevin A. Miller*, Secrets of Staying Power: Overcoming the Discouragement of Ministry* (Carol Streams, IL: Word Books 1988), 12.

[22] Miller, *Secrets of Staying Power*, 41.

Subsequently, this disturbance became the turbulent force that propelled Richard Allen and several of his group to leave and not return to St. George Methodist Church. Allen did not allow them to leave alone, he departed with them and remained connected with God's children. The small band of African Americans courageously made haste in finding a place of their own to worship God.

This appalling and disgraceful episode, evidently, became the catalyst that prompted Richard Allen to seek a place of worship wherein God would view all members with self-respect and fairness, without discrimination. With self-determination and "an act of 'African American affirmation' as a people with special needs.'" [23] The Free African Society, spearheaded by Richard Allen, came into existence. The distinguished and renowned writer and historian Charles Wesley ecstatically proclaimed: "This was the first step of the Negro people in the United States toward an organized social life."[24]

Undoubtedly, this endeavor would be the first ever officially recorded in history of an African American organization for social cooperation and economic development among Africans Americans in the New World. Indeed, it will serve as a monumental benchmark for multiple denominations of African Americans through generations of many tomorrows. The Free African Society was established on April 12, 1787 and it "was the first organization by Negroes and for Negroes" in American.[25]

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[23] Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 20.

[24] Charles H. Wesley. *Richard Allen: Apostle of Freedom* (Washington, DC: The Associated Publishers, Inc., 1935), 60.

[25] Wesley, *Richard Allen,* 60-61.

The outstandingly renowned scholar, W.E. B. DuBois overwhelmingly echoed the paramount importance of this remarkable establishment in America. With elation, he posited:

> How great a step this was, we of today scarcely realize; we must remind ourselves that it was the first wavering step of a people toward organized social life. The society was more than a mere club: Jones and Allen were its leaders and recognized chief officers; a certain parental discipline was exercised over its members and mutual financial aid given.[26]

Charles H. Wesley claimed that the Free African Society, without reservation, laid the infamous foundation and undergirding of the first African American Episcopal Church. Of course, it was the subsequent first African Methodist Church to ever be established in the country.

Then due to ideologies, the Free African Society split; Rev. Absalom was at the helm of the first African Episcopal Church; and Richard Allen became the founder of the first African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America. The overwhelming consensus is that the African Methodist Episcopal Church emerged out of racial discrimination stemming from St. George Methodist Church in 1787.[27] A similar assertion is echoed by George A. Singleton as he emphatically stated that the emergence of the African Methodist Episcopal Church is "no isolate phenomenon."[28] However, the edifice of the original establishment was the Free African Society in 1787 which lasted for approximately ten years.

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[26] W.E.B. DuBois, *The Negro Church* (Atlanta, GA: Atlanta University Press, 1903), 19.

[27] Singleton, *Segregated Sabbaths*, 9.

[28] George A. Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism: A Study of African Methodist Episcopal Church* (New York, NY: Exposition Press, 1952), xviii.

Cautiously, however, it is noteworthy to mention the awareness of the controversy as to the actual date of 1787 and not around the year of 1791 or 1792 as being more to the exact date of the departure of Richard Allen and the other insulted African Americans from St. George Methodist Church. This assertion concerning the questioning of a definitive date for leaving St. George Methodist Church has been addressed by E. Curtis Alexander. Since these dates were not recanted or clarified by Richard Allen concerning the specific year, it is plausible to conclude, as posited by Alexander that Richard Allen was only considering and pondering an exodus of African Americans in 1787.

Agreeably, J. Gordon Melton contends that the beginning of the African Free Society (AFS) was in 1787. However, he comments that there were many changes developing with St. George Methodist Church that had begun to affect Allen, Jones, and some others. Many of the concerns that emerged were with the expanding membership and increasing attendance at St. George, giving reasons as to when the galleries were constructed; the addition of the galleries for more seating was done in the winter of 1791-1792 according to J. Gordon Melton.

This implying that many African Americans would be relocated in the galleries during this period and would be very dissatisfied. Further, J. Gordon Melton states that it was in 1792 that much racial antagonism erupted with developments in the FAS.[29] Accordingly, the dissatisfaction among the African Americans, the relocation of them to various locations in the church, and the need for expansion with the construction of the galleries in time frame of 1791-1792 give credence to the notion that the African

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[29] J. Gordon Melton, *A Will to Choose: The Origin of African American Methodism* (New York: NY: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2007), 92-93.

American Methodist was not founded in 1787, but closer to the date of 1791-1792 by

Richard Allen.

Further, if such be the case, then no action of an exodus was undertaken because

the majority of the African Americans were not of the mindset to proceed with any

actions against the unfair and obvious discrimination of the whites at St. George

Methodist Church.[30] Therefore, one must conclude the wisdom, insightfulness, and

patience that Allen possessed as he waited for the opportune time to present itself for the

African Americans exodus from St. George Methodist Church from the mounting

discrimination and inhospitality of the white church. It can be alluded that this intolerable

act against Rev. Absalom Jones built the case, for more African Americans would

become receptive to departure after such an overt horrific insult. Further, this action

galvanized them to support each other, leave together, and remain connected.

Then Richard Allen and his devout followers established the first African

Methodist Episcopal Church, Mother Bethel Methodist Church, in 1794. It was a

blacksmith barn, and they referred to it as the Mother Bethel Methodist Church. At this

time, Richard Allen was a wealthy individual and defrayed much of the cost himself.

Diverse denominations and races were welcomed and given hospitality to his church. He

passionately claimed that his church would not be Jim Crow; all would be included.

However, one exception would be made to offering hospitality to others; slave holders

would be denied admission. This was written in the Discipline to remind all blacks of the

struggles of her people with their blood, groans, cruelty inflicted, and deaths since being

in America.[31] Allen was very steadfast in his decision concerning slave holders.

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[30] Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 20-75.
[31] Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism,* 10.

Allen's steadfastness in his principles of humanity with freedom for all of God's children was applauded by a host of others, especially of the Methodist faith. In 1884, the conference met and compiled *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church.* Richard Allen was noted, even then, as the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, but also as its first official elected Bishop before his death.[32] Richard Allen's African Methodist Episcopal Church embraced the tenets of John Wesley's Methodism, recognizing that God is the Maker of all, and each individual should carry the same respect for each other. George A. Singleton indicates that the African Methodist Episcopal Church "is a true offspring of the Methodist Church" as founded by John Wesley.[33]

Historically, John Wesley cast the dye that gave the world a new robust and methodological paradigm of Methodism for training, instructing, and accepting children in a hospitable manner. Wisdom was definitely a component of John Wesley's educational ideals for children. Such a dynamic model for promoting education and training has served as the underpinnings of the African Methodist Episcopal Church throughout decades.

At times, John Wesley's house was filled with poor and neglected children, and he preached, exhorted, and taught them. If necessary, he afforded them with food and clothing. His ministers under his leadership were given very detailed guidelines as to how to conduct sessions with the children. In fact, the ministers were mandated to make house

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[32] James C. Embry, *The Doctrine and Discipline of the African Methodist Episcopal Church,* accessed December 10, 2014, https://ia601604.us.archive.org/6/items/13101497.4694.emory.edu/13101497_4694.pdf.
[33] George A. Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism*, xv.

visits to the underprivileged children. The ministers adhered to John Wesley's

formulations for instructions and training of children. Generally, John Wesley's

Methodism is characterized as meticulous, methodological, and sometimes rigid. He was

a man of precision and perfection, especially when the focus centered on self-esteem and

self-respect of children and holiness. These religious activities for children included

learning to read the Bible and performing arithmetic exercises. Seemingly, John Wesley's

motto was to "read, explain, and enforce."[34]

Significant services in the educational arena supporting schooling for children and

adults were evident at Mother Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. In fact,

Richard Allen established the Society of Free People of Color for Promoting the

Instruction and School Education of Children of African Descent in 1804.

Understandably, Allen was inspirational to the viewpoint that African Americans needed

to grasp all opportunities leading to more education, for this was a main ingredient for the

survival of those with African American descent.

Additionally under the leadership of Rev. Allen, Bethel Church organized The

Free Produce Society of Philadelphia. Amazingly, in 1830, its mission was to actively

"purchase only the produce grown by free labor."[35] In essence, during this era of slavery,

it is highly inconceivable to fathom the existence of such "A group of Africans to take

this kind of position, using the boycott as a tool to fight the slavery system."[36] The

underlying tone is so fervently expressed in Allen and his followers finding avenues

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[34] John Leo Pottinger, *A Manual for Church Members* (Philadelphia, PA: Reading Press, 1942), 12-14.

[35] Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 70.

[36] Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 70.

against, seemingly, insurmountable odds to try and save their enslaved mothers, fathers, brothers, and sisters by boycotting produce to assist with abolishing slavery. Definitely, admiration is highly extended to Allen in making concerted efforts to remain connected to God's children even if they were enslaved. Further, there was always the inherent risk of backlash from others who differed with the abolishment of slavery.

Accordingly, it was very much in step with Allen's characteristics for The First Negro Convention dealing with "the aspects of African life in relation to the white population" to be held at Bethel Church. [37] This prestigious conference was to organize a strategic plan to derail and protest the plans formulated by the American Colonization Society with the purpose to deport Africans, especially those with free status to Africa.[38] Thereafter, a scheme allegedly disseminating information from the American Colonization Society announced Richard Allen as being a proponent of their intentions to send African Americans back to Liberia.

Very eloquently, Richard Allen wrote a thoroughly coherent and comprehensive letter to the Freedom's Journal dismantling the notion that he nor anyone of color should partake in such a scheme. Several major components were expounded upon in the letter, but two are of primary concern at this juncture. First, the free African American would send an unkind message to their brethren in slavery that they are being left behind, resulting in an uneasy feeling for slaves while satisfying the slave owners. Secondly, Allen spoke of the further divide of God's children by stating that, "The free must be sent away, and those who remain must be slaves."[39]

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[37] Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 64.
[38] Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 64.

[39] Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 69.

It is best summarized with these words from Richard Allen: "This land which we have watered with our tears and our blood, is now our mother country; and we are well satisfied to stay where wisdom abounds, and the gospel is free."[40] Steve Klots denotes that it was through the steadfast and industrious efforts of Allen that the scheme of the American Colonization Society miserably and rightfully failed. Yet, it was this incident that bridged the gap among many blacks, resulting in an outpouring of hope for African American with unity and harmony.[41]

Though Richard Allen died in 1831, the legacy of his assertions on the survival and connection of the African Americans remained intact with the African Methodist Episcopal Church. This was readily apparent during the Post Civil War era upon emphasizing Allen's commitment of having God at the forefront, the economic stability, and adequate educational opportunities. The tenets of Methodism have been well-saturated in the Allen's pilgrimage to others as he yearned for reconnection and freedom of all God's children, especially his black brothers and sisters of the South.

Nevertheless, the beacon of light was aflame from John Wesley's Methodism as proponents of the African Methodist Episcopal Church made the unanimous decision to undertake the robust goal of providing religious and secular education to the emancipated slaves and their children after gaining their freedom from slavery. Though it was a time of rejoicing, it was also a dismal period after the post war, especially in the southern states, for slaves had not been allowed their own churches and education for their

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[40] E. Curtis Alexander, *Richard Allen*, 69.

[41] Steve Klots, *Richard Allen* (New York, NY: Chelsea House Publisher, 1991), 105.

children. Factually, George A. Singleton pens that the slaves owned nothing, not "even their own bodies."[42]

These emancipated slaves and their children had freedom, but they were not supplied with tools and capital, coupled with organizational planning to accompany their freedom. Emphatically, George A. Singleton asserts that the emancipated slaves and their children virtually through their struggling perils were "literally lifting themselves up by their own bootstraps."[43] Such deplorable and agonizing conditions could have easily resulted into total despair and defeat. However, this predicament was soon ameliorated with the development of numerous colleges and high schools designed and implemented by the African Methodist Episcopal Church.[44] Many of these children would not have been given the opportunities to engage in meaningful religious and secular studies if it had not been for the wisdom, insightfulness, and hospitality of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in training and instructing the children of emancipated slaves.

In 1884, at the Annual Conference of African Methodist Episcopal Church, it was approved that high schools and college academics would receive sponsorship by them. Encouragingly, the ministers agreed that twenty-five cents out of every dollar would be utilized to benefit educational expenses for the thirteen colleges, institutions, and seminaries and the seven district high schools. The established African Methodist Episcopal Church thirteen institutions of higher education included:

Wilberforce University, Ohio, 1856
Allen University, Columbia, South Carolina, 1870
Divinity & Industrial School, Jacksonville, Fla, 1883

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[42] Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism*, 94.

[43] Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism*, 95.
[44] Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism*, 94.

St. Jones Academy & Industrial Seminary, New Orleans, LA, 1882
Morris Brown College, Atlanta, GA 1884
Kittrell School, Kittrell, NC, 1886
Quinn College, Waco, TX, 1872
Dickerson Memorial seminary, Portsmouth, VA
Turner College, Hernando, MISS, 1881
Western University, Quindaro, KS
Garfield University, Alabama (projected)
Campbell Institute, (projected) Shelbyville, TN
Mission Schools in Haiti, Africa, and the British Dominions[45]

These prestigious institutions and district high schools endorsed a commonality that

became a salient feature of its curriculum. They all were consistent in embracing the

notion that the schools illustrated "state of mind…racial self-respect, and racial self-

esteem."[46] To reflect on this occurrence is astounding, for at least two and a half centuries

slavery had existed with blacks in America before the emancipated slaves and their

children were able to come out of darkness into the light.

The task was daunting in pioneering and establishing these high schools and

colleges for emancipated slaves and slave children, especially in southern states. Yet, the

African Methodist Episcopal Church realized this path had to be undertaken to maintain

freedom and the ongoing survival of the freed children. The church possessed the wisdom

to realize that the predicament from whence these children came dictated that extending

training and instruction for children to include both religious and secular activities was

the most appropriate and pragmatic alternative to pursue for a well-balanced outcome of

survival.

The principles of Methodism as taught by instructors in Richard Allen's legacy of

African Methodist Episcopal Church's college and high school's curriculum launched

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[45] Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism*, 94.

[46] Singleton, *The Romance of African Methodism*, 99.

many of the fundamentals on an advanced level initiated by John Wesley Methodist Sunday schools. Similarly, as required by his ministers in dealing with the children, these children were received with hospitality by their instructors and professors. These colleges and high schools were erected in the spirit of dignity and self-help as exemplified by Richard Allen. Therefore, the African Methodist Episcopal Church gave training, instruction, and acceptance to these children of slaves so benevolently, and these students very graciously reciprocated the gifts with learning, performance, and self-respect.

Very pronounced today is evidence of Richard Allen's generous legacy of reconnecting to his brothers and sisters that were in bondage as slaves while finding new and innovative paths to strengthen their ties. In essence, he was an author of the belief that the survival of one Negro was contingent on the survival of the others, free or enslaved. Further, the litany of, seemingly, overwhelming obstacles he encountered are still prevalent in contemporary times with inequality, injustice, and oppression of the black ethnic group. The tools he utilized then are still amenable allies for survival and reconnecting the church, families, and children: allowing God always in the forefront; seeking educational skills, and securing economic stability.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

The contemporary status of the interwoven relationship between church and families, including children, must be meticulously viewed through the framework of practical theology. Indeed, practical theology will allow one to properly ascertain the impact of multiple factors involved in the reconnection of families and children to church life. Such a theological paradigm has to be strenuous and unrelenting in its efforts to delineate the plethora of variables poignantly determining the stability of the families and children, as well as the future survival of the church with its declining attendance level.

Simultaneously, this practical theological prototype will also be required to candidly view the plight of the American family (inside and outside the church walls) through the lens of the church. By juxtaposing the doctrines of the church and the needs of families and children, one is more prone to view the inherent strained linkage existing among these entities. Consequently, two overriding themes have been designated to convey the focus of this practical theological research.

With much optimism, the aim is that this qualitative research will shed insight on the lack of connection of families and child to church life and the plummeting attendance of families and children in church. With the first theme, the concentration is on the inapplicability of church doctrines and on the role of the church in ameliorating the numerous deleterious issues that are plaguing the American families and children. The

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second theme deals with the American families and children being in crisis throughout today's global world while becoming victims of oppression, inequality, and injustice from various societal forces and establishments.

The germane issues of this theological research include issues pertaining to the inapplicability of church doctrines to sufficiently connect with modern-day diverse populations within and outside the church walls. Diverse populations are positing their fervent concern on the lack of meaningfulness and no relatedness to long-favored church doctrines to their oppressed conditions. Secondly, the insistent economic dilemma engulfing families and children of God must be viewed as a major hurdle encroaching on the growth and survival of the American families and children. The poor, women, children, and blacks inside and outside the church walls in today's global society are categorized as victims in this predicament.[1]

The two prevailing themes surfacing from the church and families, including children contemporary epoch will be expeditiously addressed by practical theologians to elucidate on the occurrences pertaining to the plight of the American families and children in modern-day times. Seemingly, there is a pronounced oversight from the church as to the acknowledgement of deplorable conditions families and children of God must succumb. These horrible conditions are everyday incidences that families and children must endure for daily maintenance and survival.

The dialogue from the theologians will further share insight on the reciprocity of interactions between the church and families, including children signaling the instability

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[1] Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology*, 7.

of one entity that will eventually influence the stability of the other. Discussions on the well-being of families, including children and the church in a mutual exchange system must hastily commence. Neither the church nor the family, including children, may continue to exist as an isolate in a vacuum; all now must make a concerted effort to coexist.

Therefore, the thrust of this chapter will provide practical theological research that has the capabilities to identify relevant themes. Next, pertinent issues to the aforementioned problems must be entertained. Also, it is within this synopsis that confident research from practical theologians will utilize their expertise to expound on this area of interest.

In a concise manner, impressive theologian and writer, John Reader denotes several relevant characteristics of practical theology. He generously asserts that its primary focus should be in the realm of real problems in today's global society. First, practical theology is undeniably transformational. It has the goal of generating a difference in people, but unquestionably an interest in understanding the situations and conditions affecting people in the contemporary world.

This is absolutely a difficult task of practical theology, for it has to "be flexible and provisional as its context both in terms of church and world continues to change."[2] John Reader vividly exclaims that practical theology is unsystematic in its method of gathering research. Most definitely, it has to engage "with a fragmented and complex world which is in a state of constant flux."[3]

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[2] Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology*, 7.

[3] Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology,* 7.

He further contends that much emphasis should be placed on the affective component of human behavior. In order to accommodate this frame of reflection, practical theology promotes the notion that an array of disciplines should collaborate when pursuing research. This is necessary for numerous global issues have emerged from diverse populations in today's society.

Now, an alarming number of problems have expanded beyond the arenas of "psychological and therapeutic but also the sociological, the economic and the political."[4] Thus, practical theology must involve itself in a much more robust intent. Therefore, practical theology must proceed and go "beyond the purely rational and logical" when dealing with the issues concerning people and their particular situations and predicaments.[5]

Generously, John Reader gives insight into what elements should compose practical theology when dealing with issues of families and children as they relate to church life. He declares that practical theology must encompass an interdisciplinary approach in resolving real life issues. Accordingly, one discipline is not sufficient in providing a satisfactory explanation of the totality of deplorable circumstances stagnating the American families and children.

Countless displaced families and children of God are seeking identities in this ever changing global society. Practical theology must not hesitate in utilizing the truth of knowledge from both the arts and the sciences. Yet, it must strictly adhere to accepting its

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[4] Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology,* 7.

[5] Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology,* 7.

own limits in the scope of lending Christian support. In assessing its capabilities, the aim

is to determine if practical theology has the reservoir of skills and compassion to render a

substantial amount of amelioration with prevention and intervention to relieve the

oppressed and displaced, as well as those feeling inequality and injustice, due to

globalization.[6]

A notable practical theologian in the field includes the renowned Karl Barth. His

perspective on the three types of word of God: preaching (person to person), scripture

(Bible), and revelation (God revealing Himself) lend understanding to the role of

practical theology. These three types broaden one's focus on God's concern for humanity

and their relationship for knowing God with all communities, both inside and outside the

church. Therefore, their relevance should be highly sought in reconnecting families,

especially God's children who are victims of oppression, inequality, and injustice.

Accordingly, Donald McKim articulates that Karl Barth's perception is that "the

Christian church is the ongoing community that lives by its theological understandings

and is in constant need of theological reflection as it seeks to live out its identity and

mission in the world."[7] With Karl Barth's view, the church has a pivotal role in

sustaining and maintaining Christian and supportive bonding for the church community.

This includes the Christian mission of giving amiably to the needy services to those

inside and beyond the church walls.

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[6] Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology,* 7.
[7] Donald McKim, *A "Down and Dirty" Guide to Theology* (Louisville, KY: WJK Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 33.

To accentuate this thought, Karl Barth uses theological dogmas and doctrines to clarify a more in depth role of the church and the community. Essentially, theological dogmas should possess the quality to invite and welcome the church "to listen again to the word of God in the revelation to which Scripture testifies."[8] In this respect, a sincere effort should be made to include and involve all members within the entire church and community to hear God's word while adhering to God's instructions. Simply, "The church is both a hearing and a teaching church."[9]

Agreeably, Tyron Inbody cites similar findings on the meaning of theology as expressing its important relationship to God. He, too, indicates that this doctrine of God considers theology as pertaining to "human nature and human history, but all of it in relation to God."[10] In essence, Tyron Inbody concisely states that "theology is reflective talk about God."[11] He further credits S.W. Sykes with substantiating the thought that theology is "the rational account given of the Christian faith."[12]

In particular, displaced church families, including children, are among the detached communities who are in need of reuniting and finding solace in the church. However, some families and children have experienced noticeable alienation from the church. Often, this disconnect within families, children, and church may be due to conflicting church doctrines and dogmas which tend not to represent families and

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[8] McKim, *A "Down and Dirty" Guide,* 34.

[9] McKim, *A "Down and Dirty" Guide,* 34.

[10] Tyron Inbody, *The Faith of the Christian Church: An Introduction to Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 12.

[11] Inbody, *The Faith of the Christian Church,* 13.

[12] Inbody, *The Faith of the Christian Church,* 13.

children. Therefore, many families and children do not feel connected, worthy, and accepted in the church. Practical theology and pastoral care have the task of navigating and presenting research on reconciliation. This research must focus on both communities, inside and outside the church to ensure the survival of church, families, and children.

Interestingly, theologian Margaret A. Farley, a feminist proponent expresses her concerns with the Roman Catholicism in particular. She succinctly articulates salient views on ethics of the church with an emphasis on women issues. Her challenging points lend support for the need to re-examine established church doctrines.[13] While conveying issues on the "moral discourse in the Christian community,"[14] she sincerely suggests that her primary concern is "with the long-standing tendency of the official church leadership to deal with moral controversy of any serious nature by disallowing any voice but its own in the public arena of the church."[15]

With admiration, Margaret A. Farley narrates agreement with "Charles Curran's ultimate concern in all of his considerations … has been the capacitation of the church as a moral community with internal responsibilities and a mission in and to the world."[16] Margaret A. Farley, further relates Curran's insistence "that theologians must be self-critical and open to dialogue with all other theologians in the church" and his agreement with "Richard McCormick in also identifying corrective attitudes and actions required of

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[13] Margaret A. Farley, *Changing the Questions: Explorations in Christian Ethics* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2015).

[14] Farley, *Changing the Questions*, 69.

[15] Farley, *Changing the Questions,* 69.

[16] Farley, *Changing the Questions,* 169.

the hierarchy."[17] Essentially, Margaret A. Farley, states that the "church structures serve a 'discerning church' when they facilitate effective and creative moral discourse and when they nurture the moral lives of individuals and the church as a whole."[18]

Consequently, if the voice of the church community inside and outside the church walls is not recognized and given consideration, there is a tendency for those suffering from inequality to discontinue their affiliation with the church. Perhaps, the tenor of Margaret Farley's postulation is that church leadership must attend to the demands of the diverse populations. Simply, interests of women within contemporary settings in all religious venues, not just the Catholic Church, must be appropriately addressed.

According to outstanding theologian and prolific writer, James H. Cone, the Christian faith was called into question by the black revolution of the oppressed blacks, especially in urban ghettoes during the 1960's and 1970's in the United States. The black clergy could not defend its church doctrines in light of allegations of oppression, inequality, and injustice against blacks. A black theology was on the horizon as black clergy were forced to "re-examine their belief."[19]

With much enthusiasm, James H. Cone champions the black theology liberation perspective. He confidently asserts that blacks should be perceived similar to the Christian analogy of the oppressed Israelites being rescued from Egypt. Such a notion

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[17] Farley, *Changing the Questions,* 168.

[18] Farley, *Changing the Questions,* 169.

[19] James H. Cone, *For My People: Black Theology and the Black Church* (Maryknoll, NY*:* Orbis Books, 1984), 20-23.

would greatly impact the landscape for viewing the multiple factors impinging on the

wellbeing of the black families, including children and the survival of the church.[20]

Next, James H. Cone, passionately pronounces the need for a black theology of

liberation. It is required in order to explore and reveal the relevance or any type

relationship between oppressed blacks and God.[21] He, without reticence, demandingly

proclaims that, "the blackness of God is the key to their knowledge of God,"[22] He further

contends that, "the blackness of God, and everything implied by it in a racist society, is

the heart of the black theology doctrine of God. There is no place in black theology for a

colorless God in society where human beings suffer precisely because of their color."[23]

Furthermore, James Cone steadfastly articulates that, "black theology believes that it is

not only appropriate but necessary to begin the doctrine of God with an insistence on

God's blackness."[24] This is indicative of the notion that "God has made the oppressed

condition God's own condition."[25]

This controversial debate concerning the relevance of church doctrines to those

who are oppressed, also, suffering from inequality and injustice is still very prevalent

today. This is quite evident in diverse minority populations, especially blacks with an

emphasis on black children. Definitely, to resolve the barrage of concerns and criticisms

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[20] James H. Cone, *For My People*, 19-23.

[21] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 66-67.

[22] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation,* 67.
[23] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation,* 67.

[24] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation,* 67.

[25] Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation,* 67.

surrounding this unwavering debate of church doctrine relevancy, much more practical theological research is needed.

In a similar fashion, Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletch, echoes this urgency and further acknowledges the crucial need to address oppression, injustice, and inequality within the black community, especially families and children. He states that this is an essential mandate to ensure the survival of the black church. He further vigorously suggests that there are some significant messages concerning the "hard-core" ways of the street life that must be addressed for the young angry black child in order to move forward in Christian growth and understanding.

Both theologians, James H. Cone and Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletch, staunchly support the need for an analysis of age-old church doctrines. Accordingly, many of these church doctrines tend to impede the forming, as well as the mending, of a constructive and meaningful relationship between the church and black families, including children. Unquestionably, this area pleas for additional significant interdisciplinary research. Furthermore, Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher proposes that it is only through this exchange that a hospitable atmosphere may exist for black children to re-enter the church.[26] The implication is that the church must not only address church doctrines for relevancy to black youth, but hospitality, as well as wisdom must be graciously extended by church members. In sum, he blatantly challenges the validity of the Apostle Creed as an applicable and relevant church mission doctrine for serving the needs of black children.

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[26] Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher, *XODUS: An African American Male Journey* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996), 132.

The Apostle's Creed was established in order to preserve the true genuine purpose of Christianity, as well as the mission of the church. As of today, the Apostle's Creed is still an astonishing benchmark in many churches. In fact, it is considered an ongoing regular ritual in the African Methodist Episcopal Churches. With gratifying acceptance, it is revered as one of the prominent doctrines recited each Sunday in the AMEC congregation. Interestingly, it is also written in each subscription of the *AMEC Sunday School Quarterly Journal.* In fact, this Creed embodies the foundational beliefs held by many Christians throughout numerous churches, especially the African Methodist Episcopal Churches.

> The AME Church mission symbolizes the Creed as following:
>
> I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in Jesus Christ his only son our Lord who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead; and buried. The third day he arose from the dead' he ascended into heaven and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Church Universal, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. Amen.[27]

The tenets of the Apostle's Creed are impressively vital to the spiritual and Christian development of today's youth facing a world of confusion and perils. However, Garth Kasimu Baker-Fletcher vehemently asserts a barrage of criticism against the well-acknowledged Apostle Creed. With much consternation, he, remorselessly declares that an African ecclesiology should be constructed as oppose to the one referenced in the Creed.

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[27] William Hordern, *A Layman's Guide to Protestant Theology* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2002), 13.

Further, he staunchly advocates that, "Any Afrikan ecclesiology formulated must look outside the walls of the church buildings toward the larger community of Afrikans first, rather than looking toward finding ways to reiterate and reinforce the classic marks of the church as postulated by the Nicene and Apostolic Creeds."[28] In sum, he blatantly challenges the validity of the Apostle Creed. Accordingly, from his perspective, it is not an applicable and relevant church doctrine for serving the needs of black children who are oppressed.

As a response to a pressing crisis in the 1960's, outstanding practical theologian and writer, J. Deotis Roberts (J.D. Roberts), portrayed the community voice in the 1969 Howard University Symposium concerning the black revolution and black theology, resulting from oppression, inequality, and injustice of black people in the United States.[29] He strongly advocates the view of liberation and reconciliation. Subsequently, liberation and reconciliation would become the underpinnings for his formulation of hope as the survival of the black family and Christian faith.

Concomitantly, J.D. Roberts adamantly asserts that the oppressed, especially the black families and children, must be assured of having hope to overcome their deplorable predicaments and inequality. For the oppressed black to possess hope is not an option. According to the assertions of J.D. Roberts, hope for blacks of a better world with liberation, justice, and equality is a necessity in order to continue with the Christian faith.

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[28] Baker-Fletcher, *XODUS*, 133.

[29] J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

He flagrantly assailed to society that hope in God through Jesus Christ and the Christian faith must exist within the oppressed blacks. Therefore, he firmly expressed this intertwining occurrence of Jesus Christ and Christian faith for blacks to remove their suffering. This encouraged hope must be a prerequisite in order for reconciliation to occur with an oppressed people and the community at large.

Seemingly, this contention is still true today. Churches, in particular, must adhere to this assertion in order to facilitate the reconnection of families and children to church life. Though they have strayed from the church and God's word, the family and children of God have the capacity to remember their earlier teachings of God's word. Therefore, a rigorous Christian effort with wisdom and hospitality by the church should be extended for reconciliation.

Another practical theologian and feminist expressing God as the Liberator of the oppressed, especially women and the poor is the distinguished Rosemary Radford Ruether. She ardently endorses equality and justice for the oppressed, poor, women, and blacks. This is obvious as she proclaims God's role as Liberator.

> God also is the Liberator who sides with the poor and puts the mighty down from their thrones. This includes women, the oppressed in patriarchal societies, as those with whom God sides. Third world feminist theologies point particularly to poor women, to Black and Third World women, as the oppressed of the oppressed, whom God is empowering to become liberated liberators. In putting the mighty in all these systems of power down from their thrones, God empowers us to seek the peaceful kingdom where all humans and the earth itself are in harmonious partnership.[30]

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[30] Rita M. Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2001), 138.

It has been undeniably asserted that the economic crisis of the family, especially for the poor, women, children, and diverse populations must be addressed by the church.[31] "Poverty… is the lack of resources necessary to permit participation in the activities, customs, and diets commonly approved by society."[32] As families, especially those with children encounter on a daily basis the tentacles of poverty, it becomes even more urgent for the churches to assist them in overcoming virtually insurmountable predicaments of oppression, inequality, and injustice.

With much pride of earlier times, Pamela D. Couture cites the response to poverty in colonial times by claiming that "Historians generally agree that Americans of the colonial and constitutional eras had a generous spirit toward the poor in their midst, believing that the immediate family and the community should help in times of need."[33] Indeed, this was an era that many Christian values emphasized the proudness and caring of what it meant to be a Christian neighbor. The community was available and willing to provide resources in times of need and support for the vulnerable within society, especially women and children.

Now, displaying much consternation, Pamela D. Couture expresses the present-day flavor of American attitudes as reflective in the following excerpt:

> Since colonial and constitutional times, Americans' attitudes of generosity and suspicion have informed their struggle with the questions such as: Who is responsible for the support of single mothers and their children? Should individual parents, regardless of their circumstances, be held responsible for the

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[31] Pamela D. Couture, *Blessed are the Poor? Women's Poverty, Family Policy and Practical Theology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 28-45.

[32] Peter Townsend, Poverty in the United Kingdom, quoted in Michael Harrington, The New American Poverty (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 1984), 74.

[33] Couture, *Blessed are the Poor*, 28.

care of the children they create? Should the extended family care for these families? What are the obligations of the community, the church, or the government toward the care of single mothers and their children?[34]

Within today's global society, these questions cannot be answered without taking into account the economic, cultural, and social context of single mothers and their children. Definitely, the perception of single mothers and children are distinctively different from that of the constitutional and colonial era. Reportedly, women today have fewer children than women in colonial times. Then, children were perceived and were genuinely thought of as an economic asset.[35]

However, in today's global society, children are now considered an economic liability. Children and women both are regarded with negative connotations, especially when they are classified as being in poverty. Essentially, single-mother families are more defenseless to various levels of poverty even when women work at minimum wage jobs, but cannot obtain the necessary economic support. [36]

Pamela D. Couture contends that, "Female-headed households are vulnerable to poverty due to the sexual and racial divisions of labor which continue to give women a secondary place in the socioeconomic structure of the United States."[37] Statistics such as these speak volume as to the plight and predicament of women with children, especially minority women. This vulnerability is even more prevalent "due to child custody and support practices, female-headed households usually carry heavier economic and

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[34] Couture, *Blessed are the Poor*, 29.

[35] Couture, *Blessed are the Poor*, 30.

[36] Couture, *Blessed are the Poor*, 30.

[37] Couture, *Blessed are the Poor*, 38.

emotional responsibilities for children than do male-headed households but have access to fewer economic resources."[38]

Overall, there are three salient characteristics of female-headed households of women in inner cities experiencing an economic crisis: economic crisis of all women in general, women as mothers, and worse economic crisis for the black women. According to Diana M. Pearce, "black mothers face both gender and race discrimination. Many black women are especially vulnerable to poverty due to the structurally reinforced economic vulnerability of the black community."[39] Essentially, black women in the inner city has to carry the highest burden of economic oppression; it is categorized as "the triple economic burden of being black, being female, and living in an underclass community,"[40] Also, it is plausible to conceive the impact on the black female with children from the predicament of a disproportionate number of black minority men, regardless of their social economic level in life, who are victims of the horrific criminal justice system.[41]

A variety of settings have emerged with an outpouring of obstacles from oppression, inequality, and injustice that plague families and many diverse minority populations. With such issues in mind, John Reader hastily thrusts several relevant concerns involving the impact of globalization on families to the forefront of practical

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[38] Pamela D. Couture, *Blessed are the Poor*, 38.

[39] Diana M. Pearce, "The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work, and Welfare," *The Urban and Social Change Review* 11/1 (February, 1978): 28-36; and "The Feminization of Ghetto Poverty," *Society* (November-December, 1983): 70-73.

[40] Pamela D. Couture, *Blessed are the Poor*, 45.

[41] Andrew H. Hairston, *Dignity and Disgrace* (CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015).

theology. His three focus points are presented for dialogue. First, practical theology must analyze the blurred boundaries of displaced and or oppressed individuals. Next, it has to examine with compassion and candor when interacting with each person in his or her unique context to determine the impact of losses and separations. Then, practical theology has the responsibility to seek amenable avenues of liberation for those suffering from oppression, inequality, and injustice from the multiple aspects of globalization.

Practical theologian and writer, Don S. Browning, quite strikingly addresses the great debate occurring today concerning the American family. He concisely states that the family and its children are in crisis. The church must no longer perceive this sector of society as a private manner without the church's intervention.[42] Without any hesitation, he pens that family issues will dominate the concerns of the church in the 1990's and possibly exist well throughout the century.[43] He assuredly states that "Practical theology as a research program can be applied to families…", and "…his essays…are designed to illustrate practical theology's value for the American and world debate over the future of the family."[44] Confidently, Don S. Browning ascertains the multiple usages of practical theology in effectively dealing with families and children that are experiencing crisis.

There are six pertinent issues overwhelmingly fueling the family debate that theologian Don S. Browning espouses on to clarify his concerns. First, the families are in crisis. This is evident by the "the deterioration of the physical and emotional well-being

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[42] Don S. Browning, *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers in Modern Societies* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 52-60.

[43] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 56.

[44] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* viii.

of children."[45] Don S. Browning references two economist Victor Fuchs and Diane

Reklis, as blatantly declaring that, "American children are in trouble. Not all children, to

be sure, but many observers consider today's children to be worse off than their parents'

generation in several important dimensions of physical, mental, and emotional well-

being."[46]

Pessimistically, a dismal scenario is presented of the statistics on children by Don

S. Browning. Occurring from 1960 to 1988, there has been a drastic decline in

standardized test scores; the suicide and homicide rates for children have basically

doubled. Even with obesity of children, the bleak picture has revealed a 50% increase.

Equally disquieting has been the evidence of nearly a 20% increment of children poverty

in 1980's from a 15% rate in 1970.[47]

Additionally, Don S. Browning reveals other discouraging statistics on children

that have been reported. "Twenty percent of children ages 3 to 17 have a developmental,

learning, or behavioral disorder. By ages 12 to 17, one in four adolescents suffers from at

least one disorder. One in three teenage boys has one of these problems."[48] This alarming

summary of children disorders was gathered from the U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services by Nicholas Zill and Charlotte Schoenborn.[49]

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[45] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 53.

[46] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 53.

[47] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 53.

[48] Browning, Equality and the Family, 53

[49] Browning, *Equality and the Family*, 53.

The second dimension cited by Don S. Browning deals with changes in cultural values. Major changes in the economy have contributed to the crisis in families. According to Fuchs and Reklis, major cultural changes occurred between 1960 and 1970 that drastically changed the landscape of the family. These salient cultural changes were very noticeable. These changes include the increase in individualism, a higher tolerance of divorce, more preoccupation for obtaining individual fulfillment, and a greater acceptance within all social levels of the high rates for single parenthood and out-of-wedlock births. Though there was evidence of these occurrences before the economic decline, these incidences of cultural changes in values have wreaked havoc and chaos by now interacting and worsening the economic circumstances. [50]

With the third dimension, Don S. Browning asserts that the number of poor women and children have emerged from the changing values that have definitely interacted with the worsening economic settings. It is reported that, "Much of this poverty is associated with single parents, most of whom are women, and is produced by divorce and out-of-wedlock births."[51] Again, women with children, especially if single, are in the midst of poverty, indicative of families with children being in crisis. Furthermore, it is summarized that, "Children of single-parent families are far more likely even when they are not poor to do badly in school, get in trouble with the law, have poor mental and physical health, and have marital difficulties later in life."[52] It is an urgent plea that churches become involved in the solution for poverty-stricken families and

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[50] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 53.

[51] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 53-54.

[52] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 54.

children. Indeed, the opportune time is readily apparent for churches to assess the deplorable conditions facing the contemporary family to facilitate the reconnection of the families and children to church life.

It is with Don S. Browning's fourth dimension that conveys pertinent information on the cultural trends and values exhibited in today's American family. The single most important trend is the increasing absence of fathers. Quite strikingly, this phenomenon tends to facilitate the emergence of the feminization of kinship. His description of feminization of kinship embodies the notion that women of children are "increasingly composed of women – mothers, grandmothers, and aunts – who do the child care. Men are increasingly absent from families and their children. Social scientists report that fathers of out-of-wedlock children and divorced fathers give surprisingly little economic or emotional support to their biological children."[53]

The fifth dimension of the debate state that families in our society are simultaneously undergoing both deinstitutionalization and coercive re-institutionalization. Simply, marriage has now lost its normative ranking and status. Essentially, "fewer couples ask the church to bless their unions."[54] Likewise, it is becoming more evident that many are not involved with the process of asking the state to make their families certified and official.

However, this has increased more state-coerced actions on private lives, especially families and children in this global society. The states have been forced to

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[53] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 54.

[54] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 54.

incur the responsibility of requiring fathers of out-of-wedlock births to pay equal support as divorced fathers.[55] Seemingly, this shift in responsibilities of the states has not persuaded the churches to undertake a different course in rendering services to this new family and children arrangement that is suffering, especially economically and spiritually.

With the final sixth dimension of the family debate, Don S. Browning clearly reports that the family law is diverging sharply from the inherited traditions of the church. Until the 1960's, tenets of the Catholic canon law of the Middle-Ages were accepted. Basically, the canon law was the preferred law of the Protestant Reformation, as well as in the secular family law that existed in the Western world.

Accordingly, divorces were delayed; monogamous marriage was categorized as having a privileged status. A mutually consenting man and woman were given sanction from a public commitment to go forth in beginning a legal family. Now, many of the accepted traditions are being challenged, such as the notion to consider abolishing marriages altogether.[56]

Don S. Browning is quite ardent in his quest for the religious sector to enter the debate on the crisis facing families and children in the American society. It is a responsibility that has been thrust upon the church community to take a stand on the issues and exert its influence to resolve some of these crucial concerns involving the family. Therefore, it is not a remote thought to consider the eventual deleterious effect the family and children crisis will have on the survival of the American church.

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[55] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 55.

[56] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 55-56.

Several practical theologians have designed practical theological models that are signaling a wave of recognition to the issues negatively impacting the families and children. These models denote that it is of paramount importance for churches to address these debilitating needs of families and children. The mere existence of such models is indicative of the notion that theologians are realizing the stagnating dilemma that churches are facing in promoting reconnection of families and children to church life, inside and outside the church community.

With deliberate intent, John Reader posits urgency on the fellow scholars to observe their environment and the context of the situation. Then, with haste, scholars are encouraged to make a determination on the immediate real life problem occurring during this present era pertaining to families, especially involving children. Consequently, he admonishes the practical theologian to make issues in everyday reality your concern and involve yourself with doing something to change the predicament.

John Reader does not hesitate in conveying the notion that it is the responsibility of the practical theologian to candidly determine what the focus of concern should be, how this concern or issue should be viewed, and what should be done about such specified issue in the current real world. In essence, if these ingredients are overlooked or minimized, practical theological tools will be compromised. Their effectiveness will be diminished in resolving the church crisis with families and children, especially those resulting from the tentacles of globalization.

Uniquely, the distinguished practical theologian Lisa Hess, a professor at United Theological Seminary, contributes an impressive perspective on how the concepts of theology should be interrelated to music for training seminary students. This is an

innovative rendition of utilizing music and theology. It indicates that practical

theologians should consider acknowledging the view that practical theology must

ambitiously seek compatible information and substantive materials from a variety of

disciplines to expand the scope of practical theology.

In sum, practical theology has undertaken the ubiquitous task of generating

relevant perspectives and credible axioms for theological explanations. Thus, practical

theology has provided identification and clarification on the divide existing between the

church and the American family, including children. This, of course, has been both

ambitious and challenging for practical theologians to seek plausible trajectories and

theories on the decline in attendance of families and children at church.

With further summation, this process has led practical theologians to assess with

much more fervor the well-established church doctrines. From examination, practical

theologians are more competent in determining the appropriateness of church doctrines

for conveying meaningfulness to diverse populations who are experiencing much

oppression, inequality, and injustice. Additionally, practical theology must be applauded

for submerging in unfamiliar territories by engaging in fact-finding debates and

lambasting rhetoric to identify pertinent issues of the ongoing crisis impacting the

American family, including children.

However, agreeably, a definitive theological perspective has not been pronounced

as the practical theological panacea for resolving all theological concerns between the

church and the family, especially involving children. Yet, the ramifications from this

practical theological research have broadened the theological landscape on the American

family and the church. At this juncture, it is imperative that practical theology continues

to focus and to navigate its Christian actions to bridge the divide between the church and

family through promoting the reconnection of families and children to church life.

CHAPTER FIVE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

The relevance and purpose of this qualitative research project is to investigate the hypothesis that reconnecting families and children to the church could improve many aspects of church life. The hope is that attitudes and attendance will also improve with this reconnection of families and children. Additionally, a gender gap will be investigated to determine if there is a difference between men and women on issues pertaining to reconnecting families and children. It is of paramount importance to develop such a church model to alleviate, as well as to eradicate the suffering of oppression, injustices, and inequalities of so many families and children of God that are in dire need of the Christian faith. Ultimately, the genuine desire of this research is to render some insight as to how these issues might be resolved.

In order to pursue this goal, it is imperative that the present existing ministry models be evaluated on their merits for reconnecting church and family, especially children. The assessment of such ministry models should include the following criteria: applicability to diverse populations, utilization of an interdisciplinary approach, and a collaboration among participants. Current ministry models have involved: training seminary students, instructing and training congregational leaders, instructing the oppressed community on reconciliation, and instructing Christian liberal and

conservatives. Though all of these models are outstandingly beneficial, they do not embrace a collaborative approach launched from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Several effective models will be juxtaposed from the business sector, food industry, and the computer software and internet enterprises. They are included to illustrate collaboration among employees and leadership while using an interdisciplinary approach for diverse populations. They will portray the viewpoint that the combination of these efforts together are more advantageous and better received when the entire group is participating and aspires for progress.

Hopefully, viable and essential theoretical perspectives derived from this interdisciplinary paradigm will be sufficiently designed and implemented. Definitely, these perspectives will possess the capabilities for utilization with the church and family, including children. With this in mind, the overall aim of the outcome from this research is to contribute valuable information that will strengthen the survival of the church with reconnecting families and children to church life.

Several research theologians have developed some innovative theoretical paradigms to effectively deal with the issues facing the American family with children and its relationship to the church. These church models reveal a concern about the division of the church and God's children, especially the family.[1] Therefore, it becomes readily apparent from examining these theoretical models that they contemplate reconciliation between the church and families, as well as all children of God who are suffering from oppression, inequality, and or injustice.

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[1] Sara McLanahan, *Growing Up With A Single Parent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1-2.

With an intriguing perspective, distinguished practical theologian Lisa Hess, professor at United Theological Seminary, is a pioneer who is navigating innovative and theoretical ways to teach theological fundamental to students. She has sought to improve the avenues for teaching theological seminary students utilizing techniques and strategies from other disciplines, music in particular. Lisa Hess has devised a refreshing and unique teaching method through the intersection of musical learning and theological training.[2] This musical intersection of theology equips students with the necessary skills and strategies to effectively relate and reflect on suffering, oppression, inequality, and injustice within various diverse communities.

The optimal goal of this musical stimulation practical theology is to assist theological students with becoming more interactive and collaborative preachers. Initially, the aim is for seminary students to first utilize the musical exercise to explore and know themselves. The notion is that such introspective and reflective musical activities will assist the seminary students with becoming more vigilant and cognizant of their own emotions, attitudes, and behaviors. Once, seminary students have grasped and recognized their inner patterns of responding through the interplay of theology and music, then they will be more competent in knowing and understanding others.[3]

The insightfulness from this musical ministry model is highly applauded. Such a model has the ability for training and instructing theological seminary students and or ministers in the pulpit on utilizing this theoretical design to effectively interpret their own

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[2] Lisa Hess, *Learning in a Musical Key: Insight for Theology in Performative Mode* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2011).

[3] Lisa Hess, *Artisanal Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009).

feelings, emotions, and attitudes, as well as biases. The anticipation is optimistic that these seminary students will become more confident and competent in relating to others and conveying to them the Christian worldview aligned with scripture and God's word.

During these contemporary times, the family members of all ages are in dire need of positive communication involving the Christian faith. Considering music is such a universal language in itself, it would be an asset if theologian Lisa Hess would expand this musical ministry model to accommodate a younger population. Perhaps, modifications of the model could be introduced to those in high school or high schoolers in Sunday school classes being monitored by the pastor or congregational leader.

An impressive Program for Cooperation with a theoretical ministry foundation has been developed by the notable theologian on family views, Don S. Browning. He firmly articulates the perspective that if substantive and strategic approaches, coupled with cooperation would interact, then "good things might happen for American churches, families, and public life."[4] His Program for Cooperation is comprised of four distinct features with characteristics that could help reconnect the church and family.

His first feature insists that "Religious liberals and conservative should reconsider, at least for the moment, the narrowly defined sexual issues that have preoccupied them for the last two decades: abortion and homosexuality."[5] Further, he contends that for many of the issues surrounding poverty of mothers and children should be more dominant issues in dialogue regarding abortion and homosexuality. In fact, he

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[4] Don S. Browning, *Equality and the Family: A Fundamental, Practical Theology of Children, Mothers, and Fathers in Modern Societies* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 77.

[5] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 77.

explicitly states that few church members are well informed about the poverty that they

encounter on a daily basis. Then, divorce and out of wedlock birth contribute to even

more poverty.

Reportedly, Don S. Browning writes that at least forty-seven percent of single

mothers as head of household live in poverty. It is very disquieting, but many church

people tend not to discuss these issues seriously. Therefore, many within the church are

in denial, explaining why many do not fully understand that such deteriorating

circumstances from poverty may decline the wellbeing of children. To substantiate this

claim, Don S. Browning cites from alarming research undertaken by Princeton University

sociologist Sara McLanahan. This research is noted for dealing with single parenthood. It

succinctly addresses issues of poverty, single mothers, and the prognosis for children

living in poverty:

> Half of all children born in the 1980s will live with a single mother
> before researching the age of eighteen. Half of these children will be poor.
> As compared with children from the same social class who live
> with both parents, children of single mothers are twice as likely to
> drop out of high school and become single parents themselves,
> and half again as likely to have trouble finding and keeping
> a steady job. [6]

For the past two decades, according to Don S. Browning, the church community

has perceived family issues as being private. Therefore, many of the complex issues

surrounding family problems, such as abortion and homosexuality have been given very

little attention as if these issues were not existent for the families of contemporary times.

In order to reunite church and family, Don S. Browning contends that the church must

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[6] Sara McLanahan, *Growing Up With A Single Parent* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 1-2.

reconfigure these two divisive and important issues impacting contemporary families in a larger context.

The second facet of Don S. Browning's Program for Cooperation serves an impetus for diverse groups within the church and family to seriously consider for Christian unity. It encourages the church and family, with children involvement, to center "On family matters, both religious and conservative and liberals need to use the Bible with a greater wisdom of context."[7] Both groups need to embrace the various passages in the Bible that pertain to the Christian union of families without posing their biases on the realities of sexual behavior of families within this new contemporary setting in today's society. Both groups should be Christian-oriented in gaining knowledge and understanding of different issues in contemporary society in order to understand today's family.

Next, Don S. Browning includes the third component of his Program for Cooperation between church and family, including children. Within this area, "Christian liberals need to pay less attention to the social sciences on family matters; Christian conservatives need to pay more."[8] Interestingly, both Christian liberals and Christian conservatives utilize psychology to explain the psychological insights of individualism and personal liberation within the community. Seemingly, liberals frequently utilize social sciences and psychology by adapting to the various changing family trends. However, liberals are, also, more inclined to assist families with disruptions in their lives than finding better mechanisms for preventing situations before the disruption occurs.

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[7] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 78.

[8] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 79.

Whereas, Christian conservatives tend to set their aims on trying to reverse the declining variables affecting the families, including children. This notion signals that young Christians should have the proper values, with commitment to be able to comprehend the true meaning of family, and marriage. However, this perspective does not take into account the multitude of pressures stemming from a bleak economy, unemployment, and other factors of oppression and inequality that families might encounter. Definitely, conservatives need to utilize the social sciences and psychology to become much more realistic while aligning their values with the Christian faith. By viewing the family in this light, the church can be perceived as assisting with rescuing families and children that are experiencing traumatic situations.

Next, the fourth component of his Program for Cooperation of church and family posits the notion that "Liberals tend to look too much to government for solving family problems; conservatives too rapidly dismiss the government as a useful resource."[9] Essentially, Don S. Browning's postulation sternly conveys that in order to unite the church and the families, including children, Christian liberals need to expect less assistance from the government. The Christian conservatives should make a concerted effort for government to become more involved and supply resources to the families. Once again, cooperation is the fundamental element of the success throughout his program.

Then with the final and fifth component of Don S. Browning's Program for Cooperation, he urgently articulates that, "Religious conservatives and liberals should be

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[9] Browning, *Equality and the Family*, 80.

alert to the subversive effects of market forces."[10] With cooperation both Christian conservatives and Christian liberals can assist families, both men and women, in understanding the working environment, the pressures of work on the family, while endorsing the equal mother - father team approach in the market place. Consequently, if this idea will be endorsed by both Christian liberals and Christian conservatives, then that will enhance an equally responsible two-parent family, enhancing the survival of families and children. This will also aid in the reconnection of families and children to church life.

Though Don S. Browning has done an excellent review of expressing his own particular points, he does advocate for collaboration of both the Christian conservatives and the Christian liberals. This type of interaction is highly needed to address the crisis the American family, including children, is experiencing. Further, he advocates from the church to become involved in dealing with diverse populations to resolve these issues.

Reportedly, several theologians met and collaborated with prestigious theologian J.D. Roberts, including well known feminist theologian, Rosemary Radford Reuther to comprise the prestigious Howard University Symposium of 1969 to consult on a black theology.[11] Rosemary Ruether is highly acclaimed for her outstanding work in the field of feminist liberation theology dealing with gender, the image of God, and stereotypes.[12] Together with others, J.D. Roberts and Rosemary Reuther formulated several impressive and meaningful tenets of a plausible black theology.

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[10] Browning, *Equality and the Family,* 82.

[11] J. Deotis Roberts, *Liberation and Reconciliation: A Black Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

[12] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1983).

Considerable time and efforts were undertaken by the theologians and other committee members to ensure that guidelines on the black theology would be laced with Christian values. Agreeably, aspects of a black theology must embrace the Christian doctrines of the church and the black family, including children, in order to unite and empower the suffering oppressed black population while giving them hope. Theologian J.D. Roberts conveys the viewpoint that liberation from oppression, inequality, and injustice for black Americans truly necessitates the development of enduring and persistent hope.

The black theology compilation emerging from the 1969 Howard University Symposium consisted of six distinctive mandates. The rigorous effort of the theologians was to reconcile and empower the oppressed blacks in United States of America. With a deliberate amount of urgency, several sectors of society, especially black clergy, applauded the convening of this symposium.

Apparently, a host of occurrences filled with chaos and uncertainty had erupted within the oppressed black community, causing society to address the oppression, inequality, and injustice problem anew on the emergence of a black theology. Time was of essence for a credible resource to emerge and develop a feasible solution. Such a solution was needed to appease the black community, especially the black clergy who was experiencing concerns with embracing the Christian church doctrines that were, seemingly, inapplicable to the needs of oppressed blacks.[13]

Apparently, the Howard University Symposium was one of the community responses to diffuse the spiraling volatile disruption among the oppressed black

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[13] James H. Cone, *A Black Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), xv.

Americans. This assembly attempted to answer the call with an earnest and sober attempt at identifying pertinent elements of a black theology. Namely, a black theology must fundamentally include six stipulations.

The first three facets endorse individual affirmations. (1) Black power theology must teach love, not hate. Black children should be taught positive occurrences from their past history to ensure proudness in affirming their blackness. (2) A coalition must be formed from black unity, to nationalism, and them the inclusion of accepting the beloved community. And (3), antisexist attitudes and behaviors must develop to promote freedom for both men and women without domination for true liberation.

The other three components are more broadly defined. (4) The establishment of a democratic community is required to prevent private control of wealth. (5) A black theology must encompass a global vision of all the poor throughout the world to be free and relieved of oppression. (6), A black theology has to affirm the ultimate goodness in black religion and continuously embrace the efforts of the poor who are still struggling and suffering with hopes of freedom.[14]

Sadly, committees that met after the Symposium did not bring to forefront the recommendation for implementation of the tenets of black theology that were formulated by theologians J.D. Roberts and Rosemary Radford Reuther in conjunction with the other consultants. However, the relevance of those postulations are still of great importance in today's real world. It is alarmingly evident that an overwhelming number of disenchanted black families and children still remain disconnected from church life and Christian faith.

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[14] *The Journal of Religious Thought Under Auspices of Howard University 1969 Summer Issue,* "The Black Revolution: Is There a Black Theology?," 203.

With a well-designed multifaceted approach to practical theology, Richard R. Osmer, professor at Princeton Theological Seminary, summarizes a comprehensive pastoral care program with fourfold components. These basically hinge on the manner in which ministers relate to the congregation in an attempt to relieve the suffering from oppression, inequality, and injustice. While caring and sharing, the provider is able to maintain his or her self-identify.[15]

Richard R. Osmer's postulations consist of four pertinent tasks: descriptive-empirical (priestly listening); interpretive (sagely wisdom); normative (prophetic discernment); and pragmatic (servant leadership). It is of paramount importance that congregational leaders are competent and confident in delivering God's word to the congregation and community.[16] Richard R. Osmer's theoretical design offers the congregational leader an opportunity to develop his or her expertise in effective and meaningful communication with the congregational audience whether inside or outside the church walls.[17]

An interesting aspect of this fourfold practical theological perspective is that Richard R. Osmer has designed the four tasks with capabilities for the provider to interact at any given time with any of the other tasks. This type action ensures collaboration and continuity in bringing forth understanding for a specific individual, topic, or context. Seemingly, his vision for pastoral care consists of an interdisciplinary approach aligned

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[15] Richard R. Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2008), 11.

[16] Osmer, *Practical Theology,* 31-62.

[17] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 31-62.

with Christian values that promote a theoretical model's effective impact on meaningful connections with diverse populations of God's children, including families.[18]

With this approach, the congregational leader is qualified with an arsenal of skills. He is able to understand and identify the specific problem; who is having the problem; which context is the problem occurring; what are the issues involved; and finally making a diagnosis of the problem in order to resolve it. Utilizing practical theology in this fashion indicates a positive inclination that a reconnection with families and children to church life is on the horizon.

The first task of descriptive-empirical (priestly listening) is directly related to the question: What is going on? In particular, theologian Leander E. Keck emphasizes the importance of prayer in the pulpit. Indeed, prayer is a critical listening tool for conveying to the congregation that their concerns and issues are being addressed as the message is being sent to God.[19]

Seemingly, the connection between the pastor in the pulpit who is the listener and the one delivering the prayer must also convey the intent of the congregation with the prayer to God. This action is extremely important in gaining confidence with the congregation, for the accuracy and meaningfulness will indicate that the pastor has listened and understood the message before transmitting it to God on their behalf. Definitely, such an interaction between the pulpit messenger and the congregation speaks volumes to the level of meaningfulness conveyed in the prayer, not to mention the

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[18] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 31-62.
[19] Leander E. Keck, *The Bible in the Pulpit: The Renewal of Biblical Preaching* (Nashville, TN. Abingdon Press, 1978).

attentiveness of the listener. This is indicative of the listener's empathy to the demands of

the one in need of relief. Deliverance for the congregation may be sought from various

sources, whether of oppression, injustice, or inequality.

The second interesting component of the pastoral care model revealed by Richard

R. Osmer is the interpretive (sagely wisdom), hinging on the wisdom chapters displayed

in biblical Proverbs. This is the stage wherein the pastor investigates the issue(s) that may

be embedded in the context, background, situation, or episode. At this time the

interdisciplinary approach must be accessible, for this examination probably will entail

the arts and sciences that are aligned with Christian faith to determine an accurate

diagnosis of the problem(s) and the related issues.[20]

Much humility and caution are required in this stage while dealing with the

broken and wounded of oppression, inequality, and injustice. In this stage, the theoretical

model gives the provider the ability to liberally interact with the various components to

facilitate the fact-finding process. Therefore, the utilizing of thoughtfulness, reflection,

and moral compassion are highly encouraged by Richard R. Osmer's model. This

increases Christian relatedness, empathy, and meaningfulness of church doctrines.[21]

Thirdly, the normative task (prophetic) denotes the quality of discernment that

must be possessed by the pastor. Here the situation is assessed to determine exactly what

should be occurring in the present and relates the current situation to God's word.

Reliance on the arts and sciences may generate new knowledge and understanding of the

past and present crisis. Not only does an interdisciplinary approach expedite the

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[20] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 31-62.
[21] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 31-62.

transformational process, but God's word is perceived anew with more meaning to the Christian faith. The bridging of God's children and families to the Christian faith is evident as the provider proceeds with humility and moral wisdom.[22]

With the fourth task, pragmatic task (servant leadership), the congregational leader spiritually guides the congregation on how to respond while going through the change and transformation from being broken and wounded in situations of oppression, inequality, and injustice. This guidance is well-saturated in Christian servant leadership.[23] In utilizing Richard R. Osmer's theoretical model, the congregational leader must have credible leadership skills that allow him or her to be competent and confident in the presentation of this model. There are a myriad of problems and concerns that may be addressed with the four-task model by pastors or congregational leaders. However, this model does not adequately emphasize the advanced training that is required with the interdisciplinary approach.

Some information and materials from various disciplines in the arts and sciences are virtually self-explanatory. However, for other disciplines, an enormous amount of materials on concepts, theories, skills, techniques, and strategies pertaining to other disciplines are quite intricate and complex, requiring excessive training and instruction. Much humility and caution are required in this stage while dealing with the broken and wounded of oppression, inequality, and injustice. Next, one must entertain how conducive is this model in creating a change outside the church walls to the community at large in other venues with displaced families and children.

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[22] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 31-62.

[23] Osmer, *Practical Theology*, 31-62.

Similarly, some corporations are choosing to demonstrate their outstanding employee relationship models to involve employer and employee collaboration. These practices on designs and ideas that are employee-focused are conducive to provide a superior work environment to increase production. The multinational corporation Google, Internet engine software has an employee-centered philosophy which is "to create the happiest, most productive workplace in the world," as described by Jordan Newman a Google spokesperson.[24]

Google is known for focusing on their employees' well-being by creating a work environment that fosters a sense of community. It has a team that focuses on "creating the perfect environment" to boost worker morale.[25]

> While walking through Google's Manhattan Office in New York, one may excitedly encounter the following: A labyrinth of play areas; cafes, coffee bars and open kitchens; sunny outdoor terraces with chaises; gourmet cafeterias that serve free breakfast, lunch, and dinner; Broadway-theme conference rooms with velvet drapes; and conversation areas designed to look like vintage subway cars.[26]

Keeping the employee first in consideration for building and office design, as well as benefits will ensure a seamless collaborative and interactive positive cycle of employer and employee relations. Companies, such as Google, realize the importance of catering to a variety of needs and persuasions. This characteristic of an establishment allows it to

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[24] James Stewart, "Looking for a Lesson in Google's Perks," *New York Times*, March 15, 2013, accessed September 21, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/16/business/at-google-a-place-to-work-and-play.html?_r=0.

[25] John Blackstone, "Inside Google Workplaces, from Perks to Nap Pods," *CBS News*, January 22, 2013, accessed September 21, 2015, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/inside-google-workplaces-from-perks-to-nap-pods/.

[26] Stewart, "Looking for a Lesson," *New York Times*, accessed September 21, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/16/business/at-google-a-place-to-work-and-play.html?_r=0, 1.

recruit and maintain loyal employees that will enhance the company with their respective

talents and attributes.

Other perks that Google offers to maintain a constant supply of employees include

bringing your pet to work and offering desks with treadmills to provide exercise while

working. Unbelievably, Google provides a Lego play station to allow employees to

unwind and express themselves through creativity.[27] Employees at Google are also

provided a variety of options for dining, relaxation, meeting spaces, and work offices to

create a sense of connectivity.[28]

Additionally, international Google employees' innovative meeting areas can

range from "ski gondolas in the Zurich office, a pub-like meeting room in Dublin, and

sidewalk cafe in Istanbul."[29] CBS reporter, John Blackstone, claimed that, "The

Company maintains 1,000 bikes on campus and gives workers their own garden space to

grow vegetables."[30] Ideas such as these provide a cohesive environment that spans not

only within the company walls, but also throughout the community at large.

Employees at Google are given choices versus a dictatorship style of

management, resulting from ongoing collaboration. Choices range from choosing healthy

snacks and foods during breakfast, lunch, and dinner to deciding the times they work with

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[27] Stewart, "Looking for a Lesson," *New York Times*, accessed September 21, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/16/business/at-google-a-place-to-work-and-play.html?_r=0, 2.

[28] Stewart, "Looking for a Lesson," *New York Times*, accessed September 21, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/16/business/at-google-a-place-to-work-and-play.html?_r=0, 2.

[29] Blackstone, "Inside Google Workplaces," *CBS News*, accessed September 21, 2015, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/inside-google-workplaces-from-perks-to-nap-pods/.

[30] Blackstone, "Inside Google Workplaces," *CBS News*, accessed September 21, 2015, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/inside-google-workplaces-from-perks-to-nap-pods/.

flex scheduling.[31] Google spends a large amount of resources, research and data in developing the perfect work environment to extend the longevity of their employees. John Blackstone reports that, "Ultimately, the goal behind all of this number-crunching is to extend the life of the average Googler by an astonishing 30 years."[32] With options like these, it is clear that Google can boast about having a high sense of positive interactions and collaboration to maintain employee relations, which in return increases productivity using wise and hospitable business practices.

Similarly, companies such as Whole Foods, healthy food grocery store chains, have implemented a variety of outreach methods to create a positive working culture for their employees. Christopher Tkaczyk from *Fortune* in his post *5 Reasons Why It's Great To Work At Whole Foods* identifies such reasons as, "healthy habits, no secrets, Kumbaya culture, power to the people, and cushy extras" ways the healthy food store chain encourages collaboration on developing and maintaining positive employee relations.[33] Benefits such as these tend to create a workplace environment that is more connected, and employees feel highly valued. Perks such as "massage therapy, yoga, and language classes" are provided in various regions based on employee requests and local interests.[34]

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[31] Stewart, "Looking for a Lesson," *New York Times*, accessed September 21, 2015, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/16/business/at-google-a-place-to-work-and-play.html?_r=0, 2.

[32] Blackstone, "Inside Google Workplaces," *CBS News*, accessed September 21, 2015, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/inside-google-workplaces-from-perks-to-nap-pods/, 4.

[33] Christopher Tkaczyk, "5 Reasons Why It's Great to Work for Whole Foods," *Fortune*, May 18, 2011, accessed November 1, 2015, http://fortune.com/2011/05/18/5-reasons-why-its-great-to-work-at-whole-foods/.

[34] Tkaczyk, "5 Reasons Why It's Great to Work," *Fortune*, accessed November 1, 2015, http://fortune.com/2011/05/18/5-reasons-why-its-great-to-work-at-whole-foods/.

Additionally, employee ideas and suggestions are taken into consideration for future company planning and organization. Tkaczyk states that "the company encourages employees to submit ideas-and is known for actually taking the good ones."[35] This, coupled with "regional presidents are hired in town hall-style interviews where employees ask questions and then select from the top five candidates" allows for a greater participation from the employee.[36] The climate that infuses throughout the company is that employees are important and matter at all levels.

Business Insider reporter, Jacquelyn Smith emphatically stated that, "the healthy grocery store chain has earned a spot on Fortune Magazine's annual '100 Best Companies to Work For' list for 18 consecutive years."[37] It has been given outstanding accolades for maintaining a superior working environment and commitment to employee growth. "It's one of just 12 companies to make the list every year since its inception in 1998 and was named a top job creator, with a 784% increase in the number of employees since the list began."[38] This explosive growth can be directly attributed to a friendly and comfortable working environment, which facilitates collaboration and promotes employee happiness.

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[35] Tkaczyk, "5 Reasons Why It's Great to Work," *Fortune*, accessed November 1, 2015, http://fortune.com/2011/05/18/5-reasons-why-its-great-to-work-at-whole-foods/.

[36] Tkaczyk, "5 Reasons Why It's Great to Work," *Fortune*, accessed November 1, 2015, http://fortune.com/2011/05/18/5-reasons-why-its-great-to-work-at-whole-foods/, 2.

[37] Jacquelyn Smith, "What It's Really Like to Work at Whole Foods," *Business Insider*, April 9, 2015, accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.businessinsider.com/what-its-really-like-to-work-at-whole-foods-market-2015-4.

[38] Smith, "What It's Really Like to Work," *Business Insider*, accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.businessinsider.com/what-its-really-like-to-work-at-whole-foods-market-2015-4, 1.

Whole Foods employee, Leah McFadden, gave wonderful feedback to *Business Insider* about working at Whole Foods. McFadden states that the best part of her job is

> Developing my team members and helping them on the path of success. Whether that is with Whole Foods or not, I like knowing that I've instilled a good work ethic and passion about our products in my team members. Nothing makes me happier than seeing them start to move up the ranks and get more and more excited about Whole Foods and our products.[39]

Employee reflections indicate it is the fruit of a well-planned framework that fosters employee growth and commitment to Whole Foods.

Ongoing collaboration and positive workplace environments are becoming the focus of various other companies. Mark Crowley has found that to be true of the company called SAS, a technology company, which is headquartered in Cary, North Carolina. He has stated that, "They've discovered that feelings and emotions are the true drivers of employee loyalty, innovation, and productivity, and purposely have made workforce happiness one of their primary missions."[40]

Additionally, Mark Crowley reports that, "more than anything, SAS has found that by being an especially benevolent and respectful organization, they consistently produce the most optimal workplace performance. Their highly nontraditional insight is that workers instinctively and positively respond to an organization that routinely demonstrates that they matter and are individually valued."[41] This sense of benevolence

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[39] Smith, "What It's Really Like to Work," *Business Insider*, accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.businessinsider.com/what-its-really-like-to-work-at-whole-foods-market-2015-4, 2.

[40] Mark Crowley, "How SAS Became the World's Best Place to Work," *Fast Company*, January 22, 2013, accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.fastcompany.com/3004953/how-sas-became-worlds-best-place-work.

[41] Crowley, "How SAS Became the World's Best Place to Work," January 22, 2013, accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.fastcompany.com/3004953/how-sas-became-worlds-best-place-work, 1.

is also shown in their "Employer Volunteer Fund that provides a cash contribution to education-based nonprofit organizations where an employee has donated at least 50 hours of volunteer support in three out of four quarters throughout a year."[42] Employee connections extend both in and out of the workplace and community.

SAS has made four components the cornerstone of their employee relations. These components are "Value people above all else, to give is to get, trust above all things, and ensure employees understand the significance of their work."[43] SAS CEO Goodnight during a time of heavy industry recession "held a global webcast and announce that none of its 13,000 worldwide employees would lose their job. He simply asked them all to be vigilant with spending and to help the firm endure the storm."[44] This sense of care given from the CEO provided reassurance to all employees the company's fidelity to their continued employee-employer relationship and thus strengthened the work environment during a time of great industry stress.

Other perks that SAS offers to their employees and their families include,

Free access to a massive gymnasium, featuring tennis and basketball courts, a weight room, and a heated pool. An on-site health care clinic, staffed by physicians, nutritionists, physical therapists, and psychologists also are entirely free. Deeply discounted child care is available, in addition to no-cost 'work-life' counseling which helps employees more effectively manage the stresses of everyday life. And, of course, common work areas are routinely filled with snacks and treats.[45]

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[42] Robert Hackett, "The 25 Best Global Companies to Work For," *Fortune*, accessed November 1, 2015, http://fortune.com/2014/10/23/global-best-companies/.

[43] Crowley, "How SAS Became the World's Best Place to Work," January 22, 2013, accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.fastcompany.com/3004953/how-sas-became-worlds-best-place-work, 2.

[44] Crowley, "How SAS Became the World's Best Place to Work," January 22, 2013, accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.fastcompany.com/3004953/how-sas-became-worlds-best-place-work, 2.

[45] Crowley, "How SAS Became the World's Best Place to Work," January 22, 2013, accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.fastcompany.com/3004953/how-sas-became-worlds-best-place-work, 3.

Mr. Hackett of Fortune touted that "Employees can see a health care professional, pick up a prescription at the on-campus pharmacy and be back at their desk in just a half hour."[46] This type work-friendly environment promotes collaboration and positive interactions throughout the company.

Further, flexibility with work schedules and allowing employees to experience "fulfillment and meaning through one's work has become one of the most important ambitions of people in the 21st century, and SAS goes to great lengths to ensure employees understand how they make a difference."[47] Implementing programs that meet the needs of employees can lend to an increase in productivity and thriving employee relationships. Definitely, this is a valued goal for ensuring cooperation, responsibility, and satisfaction among the entire staff.

Like SAS, with ongoing collaboration between employers and employees, Mars Incorporated is determined to make a great work environment for its employees. "Free candy, drinks, and ability to bring pets into the workplace are just some of the perks that come with working at this maker of candy, beverages, and pet food."[48] David Kaplan reports that "there are even some unusual perks, like every kid's fantasy come to life: vending machines that dispense free candy all day long. Chewing gum at meetings is

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[46] Hackett, "The 25 Best Global Companies," accessed November 1, 2015, http://fortune.com/2014/10/23/global-best-companies/, 1.

[47] Crowley, "How SAS Became the World's Best Place to Work," January 22, 2013, accessed November 1, 2015, http://www.fastcompany.com/3004953/how-sas-became-worlds-best-place-work, 4.

[48] Hackett, "The 25 Best Global Companies," accessed November 1, 2015, http://fortune.com/2014/10/23/global-best-companies/, 5.

encouraged (as long as it's Wrigley's)."[49] Perks such as these creates a fun and light-hearted workplace, stemming from collaboration and interaction.

Mars displays concern about their employees by including an extensive manufacturing safety design plan. "The company takes workplace safety very seriously since employees often work with complex machinery and materials to produce its food products, which include M&M's, Snickers, Pedigree, Orbit and Uncle Ben's. The company also provides training courses and systematic health and safety reviews to keep the manufacturing plants and processes running smoothly."[50] A commitment to reducing injuries and creating a safe work environment provides a comfortable setting for employees in manufacturing, resulting from positive interactions and collaboration between employers and employees.

The company also provides two volunteer options that support employees in supporting their communities and the world at large. Mars Volunteers, "offers paid time off to clean parks, aid medical clinics, and plant gardens."[51] This type of program is special due to its offering of paid time off versus only general support. The second volunteer program called Mars Ambassador is, "a highly competitive program, [which] allows a select few-80 in 2011- to spend up to six weeks working with Mars-related partners in remote areas; for example, six employees spent a week in Ghana with growers

[49] David Kaplan, "Mars Incorporated: A Pretty Sweet Place to Work," *Fortune,* January 17, 2013, accessed November 1, 2015. http://fortune.com/2013/01/17/mars-incorporated-a-pretty-sweet-place-to-work/, 2.

[50] Hackett, "The 25 Best Global Companies," accessed November 1, 2015, http://fortune.com/2014/10/23/global-best-companies/, 6.

[51] David Kaplan, "Mars Incorporated," *Fortune,* accessed November 1, 2015. http://fortune.com/2013/01/17/mars-incorporated-a-pretty-sweet-place-to-work/, 6.

of cocoa beans."[52] By allowing employee volunteer opportunities to connect with each

other and other individuals both locally and beyond, they are more productive in their

jobs and positions.

Impressively, educational psychology has become a forerunner in offering models

of learning that illustrate collaboration, cooperative learning, and interactions among

adults and children. In particular, Christina Davidson has comprised a collaborative

paradigm of social accomplishment with youths and adults. A Wiggles Computer Game

was the targeted tool that was utilized in this study.[53]

While investigating the phenomenon of the development of social interactions,

the examiner was able to highlight detailed descriptions of the acquisitions of patterns of

interactions. Collaborations and connections existed in a variety of forms and settings:

among the children, the adults with children, and the communication of the children with

the instructions from the game itself. The level of social accomplishment was contingent

upon three salient features: guided interaction, cooperative learning, and scaffolding.[54]

With guided interactions, the directions and instructions are provided to a young

child by an individual. In this case, an adult provided the interactions with gestures, facial

expressions, and pointing. Simultaneously, instructions are delivered from the computer

by audible and repetitive feedback and comments. Therefore, guided interactions

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[52] David Kaplan, "Mars Incorporated," *Fortune,* accessed November 1, 2015. http://fortune.com/2013/01/17/mars-incorporated-a-pretty-sweet-place-to-work/, 6.

[53] Christina Davidson, "Click On the Big Red Car: The Social Accomplishment of Playing a Wiggles Computer Game," *The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 16, no. 4 (November 2010): 375-394, accessed March 2, 2016, http://con.sagepub.com/content/16/4/375.full.pdf.

[54] Davidson, "Click On the Big Red Car," *The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* accessed March 2, 2016, http://con.sagepub.com/content/16/4/375.full.pdf, 389.

facilitated the collaborative learning process among individuals, especially the young children.[55]

Using cooperative learning, the individuals, usually the children, learn from each other. This type of peer learning is generally expressed with children that have different levels of abilities and skills using Vygotsky's cognitive learning theory.[56] Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development is characterized as a progression of skills that occur when the task is too difficult for a child to achieve and master on his or her own. However, the mastery of the skill can be accomplished with encouragement and guidance from a subject matter expert, especially one who is knowledgeable.[57] Being aware of this educational theory may aid teaching and training diverse populations of children varying in ages and abilities within both Christian and secular settings.

The third key component of the social accomplishment is described as scaffolding. This type learning of skills, particularly with younger children, readily occurs when help and assistance are provided by an advance student or an individual that is more competent and experienced, whether a peer or an adult.[58] This technique of scaffolding also increases the interactions and collaboration among diverse learners of different level skills and abilities.

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[55] Davidson, "Click On the Big Red Car," *The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* accessed March 2, 2016, http://con.sagepub.com/content/16/4/375.full.pdf, 389.

[56] Robert E. Slavin, *Educational Psychology: Theory and Practice*, 10th ed. (Boston: Pearson, 2012), 42.

[57] Saul McLeod, "Lev Vygotsky," *Simply Psychology*, 2014, 1, accessed March 10, 2016, http://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html.

[58] Slavin, "Lev Vygotsky," *Simply Psychology*, accessed March 10, 2016, http://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html, 42.

Essentially, Christina Davidson illustrated social cognitive achievement while a four and six year old, accompanied by an adult, maneuvered and learned to play the different stages of a computer Wiggles car game.[59] The repetitive instructions and feedback from the game itself, the ongoing interactions between the two children of different ages, the collaborative interactions among the game, the children, and the encouragement with directions and feedback from the adult greatly enhanced learning. All these aforementioned positive activities fostered guided interaction, cooperative learning, and scaffolding.

This supportive and collaborative environment using Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development for cognitive learning is an asset in the training of younger children while acquiring necessary skills to advance to higher levels of learning.[60] The numerous possibilities of utilizing information from this educational psychology theory give an impressive outlook on the Christian horizon for children development of learning skills. The church and family, working in collaboration, may design and implement wholesome daily activities to assist families with their at-risk children and grade level children with learning both Christian and secular skills and techniques.

In conclusion, this is the most optimal church ministry model, an interdisciplinary model, for reconnecting families and children to church life. Interestingly, this model may be readily ascertained through utilizing collaboration and interaction of various disciplines to promote the reconnection of diverse families and children with church life.

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[59] Davidson, "Click On the Big Red Car," *The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* accessed March 2, 2016, http://con.sagepub.com/content/16/4/375.full.pdf, 375-394.

[60] Slavin, "Lev Vygotsky," *Simply Psychology*, accessed March 10, 2016, http://www.simplypsychology.org/vygotsky.html, 42.

It is of paramount importance to obtain pertinent information concerning the crisis that the American family, including children, is experiencing in contemporary times. When interacting with families and children, the church must use humility and sensitivity, for some of these family members and children have encountered virtually insurmountable catastrophic situations and predicaments from oppression, inequality, and injustice.

The general consensus is that the current church model is inadequate in handling the magnitude of systemic problems of the crisis surrounding today's families and children. Therefore, there is a dire need to investigate collaborative models from other sectors. In particular, exploration of interdisciplinary components within society must be sought to address issues involving the church, families, and children. The collaboration and cooperation within the technology venue, the commercial food industry, and educational psychology sector must be examined more thoroughly for options to pursue in developing a more comprehensive and cohesive model. With these interdisciplinary approaches, an optimistic paradigm for reconnecting families and children to church life may be easily launched with both the old and young, especially women and children in a collaborative and cooperative effort for success.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Quite noticeably, the attendance at Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church has declined to an unprecedented level over the past few decades. This situation has created a disquieting Christian upheaval within the church, family members, and the surrounding community. Now, most of the remaining members at this church are older senior members. Whereas, many of the younger church members within the family, especially women and children, have relocated outside the church catchment area. Others are less visible while still residing in the community. Seemingly, they have become disinterested in attending our church.

Therefore, it is imperative for the hypothesis to convey the circumstances surrounding Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church and its members. The purpose of the hypothesis was to investigate a model for reconnecting families and children to church life. The interview portion of the project has revealed that there is an interest in reconnecting the church members with their families, including children, and increasing the attendance at church. Members expressed an interest in designing and implementing wholesome and Christian activities for church members, families, and children. Additionally, the contemplation of examining the gender gap was considered. This was to determine if men and women both perceived similar interest in reconnecting families and children to church life.

It is advantageous for Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church members, families, and children to have positive on-going interactions. This interconnectedness between the church and families, including children, will affect the survival of all involved, for they are interdependent on each other. Historically, Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church, is approximately over 132 years old, and for decades it was very supportive and an outstanding Christian pillar of the community.

It is located in Teachey, North Carolina in Duplin County which is in the southern portion of the state. It is an agricultural and livestock area. In fact, Duplin County and the neighboring county Sampson at one point produced 1/6 of the world's meat produce. The neighboring town, Wallace, North Carolina, which Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church was once zoned has been known as the world's supreme grower of strawberries. Duplin County has a very strategic location to several military bases and beaches within a fifty mile radius.

For years, its attendance for a rural church in a southern county in North Carolina was quite remarkable. Its attendance for decades ranged from 300 to 400 individuals per Sunday in the congregation, including members and community Christian supporters. The church engaged in numerous activities for its members and the community at large. It was considered the beacon of hope for many families within the church and the community experiencing financial and emotional turmoil.

As a member of Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church for over fifty years, I have experienced the transition of Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church from a thriving spiritual establishment to one that is facing a multitude of challenges for its continued survival. Therefore, it has become encumbered upon me, as well as some of

the other members, to explore potential paradigms that are aligned with the Christian viewpoint to bring about resolution for reconnecting families and children to church life and its declining attendance problem. Wholesome programs and activities laced with wisdom from the older church members must be designed and implemented with hospitality that will welcome families, especially women and children and eventually God's children within the community to church life.

The focus of attention must be directed to seeking an interdisciplinary church model to determine the extent of interest of the older members in reconnecting them with their families, especially children, and eventually God's children within the community. A Christian pursuit of this magnitude must be zealous in its attempt to design and implement a model that will inspire inclusion. Such a cohesive effort will ensure that this action research project will be beneficial and acceptable to the church congregation.

By espousing on findings in the biblical data, the assertion is that children should be trained by older Christian church members of the congregation with points of wisdom on God's word and God's worth. The implication is that when children are introduced early in life to Christian doctrines that are meaningful and aligned with the Christian viewpoint, they tend not to deviate from the Christian path when they are older. Not only parents, but God holds adults responsible for the training and teaching of children with wisdom as to how to make appropriate wholesome choices in life. Wisdom, seemingly, is the hallmark of older members guiding children in the "do's" and "do nots" of life by conveying to them and demonstrating the consequences of appropriate and inappropriate decisions.

Further, the aim is to indoctrinate children with Christian values that will shield them from the evils and perils of life. In essence, training with wisdom to the young will provide them with an armor of resiliency to combat devastating challenges of life. Therefore, if children stray from their training and teaching of wisdom on God's laws, it is hoped that they will have the stamina and residual effects of wisdom to return to the fold of God's church.

Coupled with teachings and training on wisdom for children, it is a dire necessity for members within the church congregation to include hospitality with their interactions, especially involving children. They must not forget how hospitable Jesus was to the little children as they came for blessings, though the disciples were indignant to the children. With much elation, Jesus welcomed the children with hospitality by picking them up and blessing them. In a similar fashion, the congregation has the ability to develop programs and activities to demonstrate hospitality with a gracious welcome to families, children, and God's children within the community. More specifically, Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church must initiate such Christian activities and programs that will exemplify the meaningfulness of church doctrines to families, children, and God's children in the community that will make them feel comfortable and welcome.

Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church has to reconnect with families and children within the community by utilizing historical figures such as Richard Allen. By illustrating Richard Allen's astonishing endeavors, the quest is that the church congregation will be able to identify and accept more enthusiastically his humane contributions for the survival and interconnectedness of all God's children, especially church and families, including children. This assertion prompts the direction for

generating the groundwork for the development of a model for reconnecting families and

children to church life. Simultaneously, church attendance will improve.

Historical linkage will promote this pursuit of reconnection. Notably, Richard

Allen was the founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. He was also born a

slave and witnessed his mother and younger siblings sold into slavery. For survival,

Richard Allen embraced three assertions: steadfast belief in God, obtaining an education,

and maintaining economic stability with a job. Today, Richard Allen's principles are still

highly recommended for the survival of the church, families, as well as children

throughout our global communities and society.

To reiterate about today's global society, Richard Allen's perspectives from

decades ago are still very prevalent goals for the survival of families and children and

their relationship to the church. He had unwavering commitment to the Methodist

Church, even when faced with discrimination and mistreatment. This perseverance

inspired him to reject any colonization of affluent blacks to Africa while leaving his

brothers and sisters in slavery on the Southern plantations.

In sum, Richard Allen launched an arsenal of programs and activities that

promoted the growth of colleges for freed slaves and their children long after his death.

This was accomplished through the African Methodist Episcopal Churches. These actions

were definitely the interplay of church and all God's children for the survival of both

church and families, including children.

Next within our global society, it is of paramount importance for Rockfish

African Methodist Episcopal Church to examine its doctrines to reflect their

meaningfulness to the lives of families, children, and God's children within the

community during these contemporary times. Seemingly, society has become incensed with a barrage of criticisms on church doctrines that do not convey the oppression, injustice, and inequality that minorities, especially families, women, children, and overall God's children in the community are encountering on a daily basis. Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church, too, must be vigilant in examining its church doctrines to demonstrate Christian fairness to all.

Practical theology has provided immeasurable avenues for investigating the applicability of church doctrines. It has the capabilities to evaluate the doctrines for eradicating or diminishing the crisis facing many minority groups. The utilization of practical theology would be overwhelmingly beneficial to minorities, such as women and children who are in dire need of spiritual, financial, and emotional support.

Collaboration and communication between the church and families, including children must be encouraged with much haste. Accordingly, both these entities have been diminished in their effectiveness to grow and thrive, indicative of a catastrophic and bleak future. This daunting task of pursuing and securing a model for reconnecting families and children to church life must be of top priority for Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church. Both the church and families, including children, must collaborate, communicate, and utilize wisdom and hospitality in reconnecting and supporting each other in order for all to survive.

In conclusion, Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church needs to evaluate its current model of interaction between the church and families, especially involving children. Then the church needs to generously investigate other successful theoretical models that are aligned with a Christian viewpoint of wisdom and hospitality. Such an

interdisciplinary perspective will have the capabilities of rendering support that may help resolve or diminish this problematic area of declining church attendance. Also, it can improve the lack of connection with families and children to church life.

Several theoretical models that have been examined to illustrate an interdisciplinary approach are: Google, Whole Foods, SAS Technological Information Systems, and Educational Psychology. A host of innovative and creative ways of collaborative interaction have emerged from these types. All of them demonstrated an overwhelming emphasis on collaborative input among members, the well-being of its members, and the enthusiasm of sharing and interacting in a positive and optimistic manner. These are characteristics that could definitely enhance the reconnection of Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church older members to families, children, and God's children throughout the surrounding community.

Methodology

The qualitative approach was used within this action research model church project. Much informative data of subjectivity was revealed through narrative reports, including interviews, questionnaires, observations, and exchange of information with relevant discussions of the church history. Since several older members were involved with the church when it was very outstanding in the community with an affluent congregation, they could vividly recall some of the prestigious history of the church. It is always refreshing and very meaningful for older members to captivate the audience with their spontaneous reminiscence of how prominent a church had been while generously serving adults and children before its decline.

This qualitative and narrative prospective provided an atmosphere for both old and young members to appreciate and view each other in a more valuable and hospitable fashion. This was indeed an opportune time, for church records usually do not reflect this type qualitative and narrative reporting from its member. So often, there is sparse reporting in church files on the verbalizations of the members as to their emotions and feelings during certain eras on particular topics.

From its inception, the decision was made that the project data should be presented in a triangulated fashion. This notion is of great significance since a variety of incidences might occur to derail aspects of one's project. Therefore, it is advantageous to include several types of data during the planning stages of this project. Further, it is always an asset to establish the reliability of the data being collected.

It is important to note that the initial thrust of this research was purported to explore the avenues for connecting the older church members with the children within the community. However, that focus had to be re-examined. Seemingly, the need was more urgent to investigate the reconnection first of church members with their own families and children within the area, as well as outside the local perimeters of the church. The aim then became to develop a model for reconnecting families and children to church life. Though this change delayed the timeline for beginning and ending this project, the overriding assumption was that this change would strengthen the bonds of reconnection with all of God's children.

The interviews were scheduled in December 2015 and January 2016, several months before the beginning of the six-session project with church members. Most of them were held face-to-face with the members in their homes or at church. Some were

obtained over the telephone. A total of ten church members participated in the interview process. The interview consisted of three open-ended questions to the ten adult participants.

Also, the project was comprised of both a pre-test and post-test with ten written statements. Each statement contained at the right a check block for either "yes" or "no" categories. The two tests had similar content, but they were different. However, the two tests were equivalent in content with the post-test being slightly varied in its wording, not meaning. Essentially, by having two different forms, one for the pre-test and a comparable variation for the post-test, it conveys another form of reliability. Also, it is sometime necessary with this kind of information being presented to the same individuals that this type alternate form of parallel content information is an optimal alternative.

This rephrasing of the content information with the post-test had remarkable advantages. First, there is a tendency to diminish practice effect. For some individuals in the same testing site, this alternative form can definitely remove boredom. This was quite evident when using the same subjects with both tests, especially with older adults.

There was an additional insert attached to the top of each pre-test and the post-test. It was a nominal scale. This scale provided demographics on the church members. It was of interest to detect the gender and age of the church members, for many during the prior interview did not want their names to be identified with their statements. The demographic information at the top of each pre-test and post-test sheet on gender and age requested each church member to circle the appropriate category of female or male. Anonymity for the church members was respected, and no names were requested nor recorded on both the pre-test and the post-test.

Random sampling would have been the desired tool for this project. However, the type clientele dictated a cluster sampling. Simply, after the entire church body was notified of the project meeting during various church announcements and telephone calls, the project consisted of the members who actually attended the sessions. A few tests were completed by telephone for those who had extenuating circumstances that necessitated completing their information over the telephone.

A total of forty-two participants were included in this project, ranging from eighteen years to eighty-five years of age for the pre-test. The participants consisted of forty-two adults, including twenty-six females, nine males, and seven unidentified gender. However, on the post-test, the project was comprised of only thirty-one members. The demographic information only identified thirteen females who endorsed that category, six for males, and twelve participants leaving the gender category unendorsed.

All participants were affiliated with Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church, Teachey, North Carolina. Over the process of carrying out the group sessions, the attrition rate was noted. There were only thirty-one participants remaining for the post-test from the forty-two adults from the pre-test for the project. This still left a comfortable number of participants for this rural church project.

Numerous salient features of the observational data on the children were revealed during the action research project. However, the specific demographics on the children were lacking, for they were not given a nominal scale to determine gender and age as with the adults. Also, the children did not receive a pre-test and a post-test that captured that specific information. Therefore their designated gender and age categories were not recorded.

Though there was no official record keeping of the number girls and boys, there was an extraordinary guesstimate of approximately fifty children who attended the church action research project. Their ages ranged from around five months to sixteen years of age. These children accompanied the adults to the sessions and remained throughout the entire sessions. Throughout the training sessions, observations of the children were incorporated into the qualitative data to give speculative impressions of their interest and preferences.

Initially, participants agreed to meet at night and on Sundays after church service for five sessions. However, most of the participants changed their decisions to meet at the previously designated scheduled times. Multiple excuses were given involving job inconveniences, babysitting relatives, traveling out of area, and difficulty driving at that time. The compromise was that many participants agreed to meet on a Sunday afternoon for three to four hours to assist me with the church project.

Therefore, the research project occurred on a Sunday afternoon, after church service on April 10, 2016, for four hours with energizing and wholesome breaks. The process consisted of four sessions, coupled with the pre-test and the post-test. All sessions were held at Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church, Teachey, North Carolina Fellowship Hall. The church Fellowship Hall is the most newly and elaborately constructed building in the area, and having the project at this site elevated it significance. Meals were provided and incentives during the sessions and breaks to accommodate the participants and children during their long stay after church service.

Implementation

The first portion of the project occurred during the months of December 2015 and January, 2016. The interviews consisted of three areas for church members to provide open-ended comments: church attendance over the past few decades, church involvement of family and children, and any recommendations for reconnecting families and children. Some church members did not want their names associated with their comments. No names were recorded on any of the data collected from church members for this action research project.

The second portion of the project occurred in the Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church Fellowship Hall on April 10, 2016, immediately following church service. As the adult participants completed the pre-test, the fifty children accompanying them ate lunch. During the first break, the participants were served lunch. The children were given a surprise cupcake party. The intent of the surprise cupcake party and lunch session was to display hospitality to the Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church members (old and young).

The Context Associates assisted and disseminated age-appropriated packets and activities between sessions to demonstrate church hospitality with wholesome activities. Not only informative, but caution was given during many of the sessions and break activities in order that church wisdom could be exhibited in the manner information was exchanged among the participants. Indeed, it is important to lead by example, sometimes even in churches, this can be obscured by other ongoing functions.

The first session after lunch centered on the declining attendance at the church. Historical reports were given as to the prestigious status Rockfish AME Church has

maintained since its inception for decades. Various viewpoints were discussed lending support as to why this legacy was disappearing with the continuing absence of family and children.

Valuable information was given by several members. Some expressed the interconnectedness of the church, family, and community in the past at Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church. Outstanding members and their roles in the church were addressed. Members actually role-played the portrayal of some events surrounding older deceased members. The milieu became one of nostalgia filled with respect and caring by the current members. The children looked with appreciation and respect as they observed the admiration expressed by older church members. Question and answer period followed the session.

A break occurred after the question and answer period. The second occurrence of using wisdom with hospitality demonstrated wholesome activities that older and younger members could participate in simultaneously. A Context Associate provided "Name That Member Game" of historical occurrences or situations from the past involving Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church members and families. The members were very excited and enthusiastic about playing the game. Age-related games of seek and find puzzles were given to the children by the context associates. Much laughter and interchanges occurred amid the wholesome activities. No one complained of the time.

The next training session reflected on the family crisis. Information was imparted on families in crisis, even those connected with the church members. The emphasis was centered on the prevalent multitude of deleterious circumstances that numerous families are encountering daily. This bleak picture was very poignantly directed to shine light on

today's family, especially involving women and children. The children were obediently attentive, and did not interrupt.

The global impact was discussed. Information was given on the financial circumstances plaguing women and children without church support. Many are isolated from their family of origin by proximity or by noninvolvement within the same locale. Question and answered period occurred concerning the role of the church. The thirty minute break involved Christian puzzle activities for the adults, as well as for the children. Interesting facts about the Bible were revealed. The exercises and activities demonstrated appropriate age activities that the church could adopt as ongoing wholesome and Christian activities between adults and children to promote hospitality.

During the next session, the applicability of church doctrines on the inequality, injustice, and oppression of minorities, especially women and children was discussed. Many questions and answers developed. Church members engaged in conversations that promoted more involvement for future activities. The next break period entailed ideas that were facilitated by the church members. They compared the way things happened in the past at Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church and possibilities for the future.

The last session consisted of the theoretical model that dealt with collaboration and positive interaction among members. Fundraising ideas were discussed as to how to promote wholesome activities. Past graduates of the church, some professionals, military personnel, college students, and factory workers would be the primary designers to launch fundraising projects. Some would be located in the community, and others would be in other locals. Interestingly, the children were very obedient and attentive throughout the entire process.

Such activities could be utilized to defray expenses for children activities and programs, such as giving incentives for making A's, and B's in the grades K-12 and appropriate conduct grades. Discussions included having two to three family gatherings throughout the year. Further, it was indicated that military families and children should be sent care packages and college students given care packages or financial support. A question and answer session was given.

The participants engaged in excitement over assisting with fundraising ideas to support these activities. Afterwards, the post-test was given. It was very refreshing to note that many of the participants were still very eager and motivated to be a part of the project after the post-test was administered. Some even stated that they would be available to help with any upcoming fundraisers.

Interview Results

1. Has the attendance at Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church declined over the past decades?

    A. All ten church members stated "yes" to the steady decline in attendance at Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church over the past decades.

2. Is there adequate involvement of families and children in the church programs?

    A. Only two of the ten participants stated that the involvement of families and children in the church is adequate, and things are fine.

    B. Whereas, eight of the ten stated that more programs are needed at the church with family and children participation.

3. What recommendations do you suggest for reconnecting church members with their families and children?

   A. Eight of the ten suggested fundraisers to help with activities of church members with family and children.

   B. Five of these eight participants suggested at least three gatherings at the church each year just for families and children.

   C. The other three recommended having separate adult and children wholesome Christian activities away from the church, such as movies, restaurant dinners, or amusement parks, etc.

   D. But, two of the interviewees felt that things should continue as usual, and they were not interested in any type fundraiser for the church families and especially children.

Pre-Test Results

The data representing the information gathered from all ten questions of the pre-test is displayed in following tables. Summarized information for all forty-two participants (twenty-six females, nine males, and seven no gender identification) are divided into columns designating the frequency number and percentage under categories "yes," "no," and "blank" for no answer. Please note that all percentages were rounded up with five and above to the next number or the lower number if below five. Therefore, the approximate percentages are given after rounding.

Question #1

Have you, your brothers and sisters, your children, and your grandchildren all at the same time attended a Rockfish AME Church activity within the last year? The results indicated on the pre-test for Question #1 that out of forty-two

participants that thirteen of the twenty-six females endorsed the category "yes," twelve

endorsed category "no," and one female left the answer blank. For this same question,

consisting of nine males of the total forty-six participants, six males checked "yes"

category, one male circled "no" category, and two males left the answer blank. The third,

no gender identification of seven endorsed question #1 with five for category "yes" and

two for category "no."

Questions 1: Participant # and Percentage Table 1

42 Participants	YES		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
26 Females	13	31%	12	29%	1	2%
6 Males	6	14%	1	2%	2	5%
7__No Gender	5	12%	2	5%	0	0%
TOTAL	**24**	**57**%	**15**	**36**%	**3**	**7%**

Question #2

Do you think the number of church members regularly attending Rockfish AME Church every Sunday is adequate?

The results revealed on Question #2 that no females endorsed the category "yes," twenty-

five checked the "no" category, and one female left the answer blank. For the males,

three endorsed the category "yes" and six males checked "no." Under the no gender,

there three who endorsed the category "yes" and four who checked "no" category.

Question 2: Participant # and Percentages Table 2

42 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
26 Females	0	0%	25	60%	1	2%
6 Males	3	7%	6	14%	0	0%
7 No Gender	3	7%	4	10%	0	0%
TOTAL	**6**	**12**%	**35**	**84**%	**1**	**3**%

Question #3

Do you think an adequate number of children attend Rockfish AME Church every Sunday?

The results showed that on Question #3 that no females checked category "yes," and of the forty-two total, all twenty-six females endorsed category "no," with no females leaving any categories blank. For males on this question, two stated "yes" category, and seven endorsed the remaining "no" category. On the no gender forms, there were four in the "yes" category and three in the "no" category.

Question 3: Participant # and Percentages Table 3

42 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
26 Females	0	0%	26	62%	0	0%
6 Males	2	5%	7	17%	0	0%
7No Gender	4	10%	3	7%	0	0%
TOTAL	**6**	**15**%	**36**	**86**%	**0**	**0**%

Question #4.

Do your family members meet with other Rockfish AME Church members regularly outside of church for leisure and fun activities: dinner and movies?

The data from this question showed that of the twenty-six females, six stated "yes," and twenty reported "no." For the nine males, none checked "yes," and nine reported "no." The no gender category showed one for "yes," five for "no," and one was left blank.

Question 4: Participant # and Percentages Table 4

42 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
26 Females	6	14%	20	48%	0	0%
6 Males	0	0%	9	21%	0	0%
7 No Gender	1	2%	5	12%	1	2%
TOTAL	**7**	**16**%	**34**	**81**%	**1**	**2%**

Question #5

Do you contact your family members at least two to three times per month? The results revealed that of the twenty-six females, twenty-one stated "yes," three checked "no," and two left answers blank. Responses from the males showed that five said "yes," with two showing "no," and two did not respond. With no gender, five checked "yes," one endorsed "no," and one responded with no answer.

Question 5: Participant # and Percentages Table 5

42 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
26 Females	21	50%	3	7%	2	5%
6 Males	5	12%	2	5%	2	5%
7 No Gender	5	12%	1	2%	1	2%
TOTAL	**31**	**74**%	**6**	**14**%	**5**	**12%**

Question #6

Do you and Rockfish AME Church members telephone or visit the Sick and Shut-In Members once a week?

The findings revealed that five females stated "yes," and twenty-one checked "no." For

the males, two responded "yes," and seven said "no." With the no gender, there responses

included two for "yes," and five for "no."

Question 6: Participant # and Percentages Table 6

42 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
26 Females	5	12%	21	50%	0	0%
6 Males	2	5%	7	17%	0	0%
7 No Gender	2	5%	5	12%	0	0%
TOTAL	**9**	**22**%	**33**	**79**%	**0**	**0%**

Question #7

Do you and Rockfish AME Church members contact other church members to determine if they are in need of financial or emotional support?

The data revealed that for females, seven stated "yes," and nineteen checked "no." With

the males, two endorsed "yes," and seven stated "no." For no gender, three said "yes,"

and four checked "no."

Question 7: Participant # and Percentages Table 7

42 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
26 Females	7	17%	19	45%	0	0%
6 Males	2	5%	7	17%	0	0%
7 No Gender	3	7%	4	10%	0	0%
TOTAL	**12**	**29**%	**30**	**72**%	**0**	**0%**

Question #8

Is there a program at Rockfish AME Church to welcome newborn children of church members and their families into the church to assist them with Christian support and guidance?

The data showed that of the females, three stated "yes," and twenty-three checked "no."

Whereas, with the nine males, three responded with "yes," and six checked "no."

However, with the no gender, there were five for "yes" and two for "no."

Question 8: Participant # and Percentages Table 8

42 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
26 Females	3	7%	23	55%	0	0%
6 Males	3	7%	6	14%	0	0%
7 No Gender	5	12%	2	5%	0	0%
TOTAL	**11**	**26**%	**31**	**74**%	**0**	**0%**

Question #9

Does Rockfish AME Church have a program for rewarding children, grandchildren, and church members on making school progress with A's, B's and good conduct in school for K-12 grades?

Findings from this question revealed that females checked four for "yes," and twenty-two

for "no." With males, they endorsed six for "yes," and three for "no." The no gender

showed five for "yes," and two for "no."

Question 9: Participant # and Percentages Table 9

42 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
26 Females	4	10%	22	52%	0	0%
6 Males	6	14%	3	7%	0	0%
7 No Gender	5	12%	2	5%	0	0%
TOTAL	**15**	**36**%	**27**	**64**%	**0**	**0%**

Question #10

Does Rockfish AME Church have a care package program for remembering
children, grandchildren, and church members in the military and college?

For question 10, females revealed five for "yes," twenty for "no," and they left one blank.

The males checked six for "yes," and three for "no." The no gender marked five for

"yes," and two for "no."

Question 10: Participant # and Percentages Table 10

42 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
26 Females	5	12%	20	48%	1	2%
6 Males	6	14%	3	7%	0	0%
7 No Gender	5	12%	2	5%	0	0%
TOTAL	**16**	**38**%	**25**	**60**%	**1**	**2%**

Post-Test Results

The data representing the information gathered from all ten questions of the post-test is displayed in the following tables. Summarized information for all thirty-one, not forty-two, participants (thirteen females, six males, and twelve no gender identification) are divided into columns designating the frequency number and percentage under categories "yes," "no," and "blank" for no answer. Please note that all percentages were rounded up with five and above to the next number or the lower number if below five. Therefore, the approximate percentages are given after rounding.

Question #1 (Statement)

I like the idea of my family, brothers and sisters, children, land grandchildren all meeting at the same time attending a Rockfish AME Church activity at least twice per year.

The data showed that for females, there were thirteen "yes" and none for both "no" and "blank." With males, they had five for "yes" and one for "no." The no gender, they checked eleven for "yes," none for "no," and one left "blank."

Question 1: Participants # and Percentages Table 11

31 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
13 Females	13	42%	0	0%	0	0%
6 Males	5	16%	1	3%	0	0%
12 No Gender	11	35%	0	0%	1	3%
TOTAL	**29**	**93**%	**1**	**3%**	**1**	**3%**

Question #2 (Statement)

I want to see more church members regularly attending Rockfish AME Church every Sunday, as well as increasing our church membership.

Information revealed that thirteen females marked "yes," none checked "no" and left

"blank." For males, the data showed six were for "yes," none checked "no" and left

"blank." With the no gender, there were ten to identify with "yes," none for "no," and

two left answers "blank."

Question 2: Participants # and Percentages Table 12

31 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
13 Females	13	42%	0	0%	0	0%
6 Males	6	19%	0	0%	0	0%
12 No Gender	10	32%	0	0%	2	6%
TOTAL	**29**	**93**%	**0**	**0**%	**2**	**6%**

Question #3

We should find positive ways to encourage more children to attend Rockfish
AMEC every Sunday by providing them with healthy and age appropriate
Christian activities within and outside of the church: field trips, movies, museum,
and church conferences.

Females on question 3, reported thirteen for "yes," and none for "no" and left "blank."

For the males, five marked "yes," none checked "no," and one was left "blank." With the

no gender, there were twelve who identified with "yes," and none with "no" and none left

"blank."

Question 3: Participants # and Percentages Table 13

31 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
13 Females	13	42%	0	0%	0	0%
6 Males	5	16%	0	0%	1	3%
12 No Gender	12	39%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	**30**	**97**%	**0**	**0%**	**1**	**3%**

Question #4 (Statement)

It is a good ideal for all Rockfish AMEC members to meet with other church members regularly outside of church for wholesome activities such as dinner and movies.

The data revealed that thirteen females marked "yes," and none checked "no" or left any

"blank." All six males identified with "yes," and none marked "no" or left any "blank."

For no gender, all twelve checked "yes," none checked "no" or left any "blank."

Question 4: Participants # and Percentages Table 14

31 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
13 Females	13	42%	0	0%	0	0%
6 Males	6	19%	0	0%	0	0%
12 No Gender	12	39%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	**31**	**100**%	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**

Question #5 (Statement)

I am going to make an effort to contact my family members at least 2 to 3 times per month.

The data revealed that for the thirteen females, all marked "yes," and none for "no" and

"blank." With males, all six checked "yes," and no marks for "no" and "blank." The no

gender category endorsed all "yes," and none for "no: and "blank."

Question 5: Participants # and Percentages Table 15

31 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
13 Females	13	42%	0	0%	0	0%
6 Males	6	19%	0	0%	0	0%
12 No Gender	12	39%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	**31**	**100**%	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**

Question #6 (Statement)

Rockfish AME Church members need to improve our contact with making phone
calls and visits to the sick and Shut-In Members at least once a week.

With the females, all thirteen marked "yes," and none for "no: and "blank." The males

had similar patterns with all six males marking "yes," and none for "no" and "blank."

Also, with the no gender, all twelve checked "yes," and none for "no" and "blank."

Question 6: Participants # and Percentages Table 16

31 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
13 Females	13	42%	0	0%	0	0%
6 Males	6	19%	0	0%	0	0%
12 No Gender	12	39%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	**31**	**100**%	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**0%**

Question #7 (Statement)

Rockfish AME Church members need to develop strategies to assist our church members who are in need of financial and emotional support.

For all thirteen females, they marked 'yes," and none for "no" and "blank." With the six

males, five out to six marked "yes," none for "yes," and one for ""blank." The no gender

checked all "yes," and none for "no" and for "blank."

Question 7: Participants # and Percentages Table 17

31 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
13 Females	13	42%	0	0%	0	0%
6 Males	5	16%	0	0%	1	3%
12 No Gender	12	39%	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	**30**	**97**%	**0**	**0%**	**0**	**3%**

Question #8 (Statement)

I agree, it is a responsibility of Rockfish AMEC members to assist with Christian training for newborn children of church members and their families.

The thirteen females all marked "yes," and none for "no" and "blank." With the six

males, all of them checked "yes," none for "no" and "blank." The no gender endorsed

eleven for "yes," none for 'no" and one left "blank."

Question 8: Participants # and Percentages Table 18

31 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
13 Females	13	42%	0	0%	0	0%
6 Males	6	19%	0	0%	0	0%
12 No Gender	11	35%	1	3%	0	0%
TOTAL	**30**	**96**%	**1**	**3%**	**0**	**0%**

Question #9 (Statement)

I would be willing to work on fundraisers to assist with rewarding rockfish AME Church children, grandchildren and church members for their school progress with A's, B's and good conduct in school for K-12 grades.

The data revealed all thirteen females marked "yes," and none endorsed "no" and no left blank." Similarly, all six males marked "yes," and none checked "no" and left none "blank." However, with the no gender group, ten marked "yes," one marked "no," and one was left "blank."

Question 9: Participants # and Percentages Table 19

31 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
13 Females	13	42%	0	0%	0	0%
6 Males	6	19%	0	0%	0	0%
12NoGender	10	32%	1	3%	1	3%
TOTAL	**39**	**93**%	**1**	**3%**	**1**	**3%**

Question #10 (Statement)

It is a great idea to prepare care packages in remembering Rockfish AMEC children, grandchildren & church members in the military and college.

The findings revealed that all thirteen of the females checked "yes," and none marked "no" or left any "blank." All six males checked "yes," and none for "no" and none left "blank." The category of no gender checked eleven out of twelve "yes," and one "no" and none left "blank."

Question 10: Participants # and Percentages Table 20

31 Participants	Yes		NO		Blank	
	Number	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**	**Number**	**Percent**
13 Females	13	42%	0	0%	0	0%
6 Males	6	19%	0	0%	0	0%
12 No Gender	11	35%	1	3%	0	0%
TOTAL	**30**	**96**%	**1**	**3%**	**0**	**0%**

Children Observational Data Results

Several interesting features were cited that were demonstrated with the children while sitting at adjacent tables during the adult training sessions. First, the invitation to the children had been an incentive for the parents, adults, and families connected with church members to attend the sessions. The parents were informed of a surprise cupcake party for all the children who would attend. However, parents were instructed that they could not reveal the surprise to the children. From the responses, both children and adults, the cupcake surprise was definitely a hospitality-building accomplishment. The adults were very appreciative and excited about the cupcake surprise for the children.

With the children, it was an unbelievable burst of enthusiasm from the children for the cupcake surprise. Many of the children stood and viewed the plentiful number of cupcakes with the assorted flavors on the table with much amazement. Their eyes were

filled with excitement and astonishment, coupled with their endearing smiles of approval.

Some giggled and whispered that this was their first cupcake party.

Secondly, I demonstrated to the children and adults the wisdom of providing

church hospitality to both children and adults in the same setting, with cupcakes, dinner,

and wholesome activities. Thirdly, this occasion illustrated an opportune time for

allowing both adult and children to interact and observe each other in a Christian milieu.

None of the adults were indignant or inappropriate to the children. Throughout the entire

training sessions, the children's mannerisms exhibited respect and high regard for the

adults as they engaged in diverse topics and rigorous discussions. Seemingly, the children

gave the impressions that they belonged, and the church was an extension of them and

their families.

Summary of Learning

A voluminous amount of data was gathered from the Interview, pre-test, post-test,

the four training sessions, and the children qualitative observational data, coupled with

wholesome Christian activities and exercises that were interspersed throughout the

sessions. Much information was collected and interpreted from the triangulated resources

of interviews, the pre-test and the post-test of this qualitative research action project.

From the interview, most of the church members expressed the general consensus that

there is a decline in church attendance.

Several themes were frequently spiraling throughout the action research project,

which included anonymity, lack of information on what impacts low attendance at

church, and the lack of knowledge as to how to create an atmosphere for reconnecting

church members, old and young. Some disclosed that more church involvement is needed

with families and children. Yet, a considerable number requested being anonymous on

the data when revealing the forthcoming data analysis.

Much interest on the level of anonymity was exhibited by the participants in the

interview and both the pre-test and post-test. Though the participants were assured that

their names would not be included on any of the paperwork, some participants did not

endorse their gender. This could have been an oversight. However, the high number of

absent identification of gender required a "no gender" category to be included on data

collection tables.

Seemingly, it was quite evident that many of the participants felt uncomfortable in

revealing their names and any particular endorsements concerning functions and events

about the church. The anonymity notion occurred within the pre-test and the post-test, as

well as the interview of this action research project. The researcher explored the idea that

this occurrence might have been disguised in the "no gender" and "blank" categories.

Perhaps, some participants might have thought it would be non-Christ-like to endorse

some responses.

Several strikingly prominent features were illustrated from both the pre-test and

the post-test of the Rockfish African Methodist Episcopal Church. The responses to the

"yes" and "no" categories on the pre-test were outstandingly different to the responses

revealed on the post-test. A much more robust display of "yes" responses occurred on the

post-test as opposed to the elevated frequencies and percentages of "no" responses on the

pre-tests by participants.

The four training sessions with incorporated facts and historical wisdom from the Biblical, Historical, Theological, and Theoretical Foundations most definitely had an impact on the response data from the post-test. The question and answer periods were encouraged. Involvement and genuine listening to the participants provided an overwhelmingly positive interaction among the participants within the training sessions before the responses of the participants on the post-test.

With the collaborative interactions among the adult participants and children during the wholesome and hospitable activities during the break period, I was able to observe the heighten level of delightful verbal exchanges throughout the Fellowship Hall among the older members, their families, and children. The children appeared comfortable with no intimidation in the training sessions with the adults. There were no hierarchical demands being placed on each other.

Stemming from the training sessions, the children were able to observe how adults react to old and new information. When historical information on older church members and the church itself was presented, it was apparent that many of the children were not cognizant of the church's history. They viewed the process of disagreement, information exchange, and compromise for the benefit of positive change. Essentially, the children were able to witness how adults responded to prior information, learned new information, and how they appropriately resolved current issues.

The trajectory was that children would be able to formulate their perspectives from the training sessions as how adult church members were leading by example. The posture of the children displayed genuine concern as they noted decisions being discussed as to how the church members could assist with some of the disruptions and detrimental

circumstances in the global families of today. The body language of the children indicated that they were grateful to be included in this church and family gathering.

Their facial countenance revealed much delight and approval when the sessions centered on incentives for their academic progress with grades and school conduct. The responses of the children to the surprise cupcakes gave the impression that the children felt that the church members were proud of them. To further enhance this wonderful scenario, some of the adults asks permission to get a cupcake. The delightful laughter from some of the children made many of the adult church members smile, too.

The interconnectedness among the participants facilitated a well-saturated hospitable and Christian environment before the administration of the post-test. Lastly, this environment provided an opportunity to determine if the adults and children were comfortable in the same casual setting. Essentially, the training sessions, coupled with the group cohesiveness maintained its accessibility to foster a change with reconnecting families and children to church life.

Reflecting this notion were the responses on the post-test, for they were highly differentiated from those on the pre-test. This phenomenon was evident with all groups: females, males, and no gender. Therefore, the hypothesis to investigate a model for reconnecting families and children to church life according to data from this project, supports it. Definitely, this church model is an applicable model for reconnecting church members, families and children. The above outline and tables depict these results obtained with the interview, pre-test, and the post-test, along with the children observational data

Within the interview, members briefly disclosed information on the attendance problem at church, especially involving children. . Though they, seemingly, agreed that something needed to occur that would assist with this problematic area, but few, if any has been willing to accept the initiative to spearhead the task. Some even suggested that things would be fine if things remained the same with the steady decline of church enrollment. Overall, in the interview, most did not give a commitment to pursuing the goal of assisting with improving the attendance dilemma.

Information, after the pre-test and before the post-test was administered during sessions by the researcher, focused on several topics. These areas concentrated on issues pertaining to the church and family, coupled with ongoing obstacles and hurdles that could be impeding the reconnection and survival of both these entities. While differentiating the various responses given on the pre-test and then those on the post-test by females, males, and no gender individuals, it was astounding to view the differences in answers between the two tests.

Most noteworthy on the pre-test were question number two and question number three pertaining to attendance. They both received the highest percentage of endorsement with the "no" categories for church lack of attendance at 84% and children lack of attendance of 86%. Whereas, these two questions as statements on the post-test after the training sessions yielded basically the opposite responses of 93% and 97% for the "yes" category, indicating a preference for a greater level of attendance for church members and attendance for children.

More impressively, all the "yes" responses on the post-tests were outstandingly varied from 93% to 100% for statements one through ten on the entire survey

questionnaire. Whereas, on the pre-test, none of any of the responses, including the "no" responses were recorded above 86%. The assumption from the pre-test data is that most of the participants endorsed statements that conveyed the assertion that attendance has drastically decreased at Rockfish AME Church among the overall congregation, quite noticeably with children. Also revealed from the data is that there are few, if any, wholesome Christian programs and activities at the church for children, and at times, for adults.

Further, the results from the post-test did indeed support the contention that many members are favorable with designing and implementing such programs and activities that are aligned with the Christian viewpoint for the church members, families, and children. Concomitant to the test results, several participants articulated their views to assist with any fundraising plans in the future to reconnect families and children to church life. Therefore, to reiterate, this action research project findings have confirmed the hypothesis that this project is a model for reconnecting families and children to church life and increasing church attendance.

However, the data was inconclusive as to whether there is a gender difference for preferences within the pre-test and the post-test. There was much disparity in the number of females to males as participants in the project. Such comparisons of gender preferences would have been biased, for the results would have been skewed and confounding. Any type generalizations would have been spurious and limited.

Conclusion

The adult participants, children, and I were all enthused about this project. Though all the participants were not in complete agreement with all the recommendations of various fundraisers, in particular, to strengthen the reconnection of families and children to church life, they became acutely aware of the perils and obstacles facing the church and family, including children. Some members were in disbelief that the church was once a very thriving community church supplying financial and emotional support to the community at large.

Some mothers engaged in discussions after the post-test to inquire on ways that they would be willing to assist with fundraisers to benefit the children. Others commented on how much they enjoyed the wholesome Christian activities at church that involved both adults and children in the Fellowship Hall. Of special noteworthy mention was the meeting of several females later that evening to design and implement a benefit fundraiser dinner for an ill church member. Seemingly, it has been nearly a decade since the church has supported such a worthy cause.

A group of female church members formed a group that afternoon to work on plans to support activities for children, such as providing incentives for their school grades and good conduct grades. Included in these plans would be to initiate monthly birthday card celebrations. Birthday cards would be sent to all church members, their families, and children, regardless of where they resided. They emphasized the desire to reconnect with college students and military families related to our church members.

There are several things that I would perform differently for a future project. I would spend more time gaining the trust of the participants. Perhaps, I could determine

why so many of them did not want to reveal their gender, and even answer some of the questions. The anonymity is a variable that can easily diminish plausible generalizations about the results of any project.

Perhaps, if this project was repeated, I would suggest diminishing any possibility of research bias. Essentially, there could have existed bias with the responses given by the participants because of the established relationship with me, the pre-test and post-test examiner as it relates to church membership. To avoid this dilemma, a recommendation would be to allow two outside neutral researchers to administer both the pre-test and the post-test. Hopefully, this would eliminate any possible effects from the participants' uncomfortable feelings with endorsing their true answers and identities.

Indeed, the cluster sample was invaluable to the project. Simply, I had to use the participants who attended the sessions. In such cases, it is quite prudent to be cautious, for the probability of skewed data might render frequent confounding variables of data from this type cluster sample. Yet, it would have been highly advantageous to have obtained a reasonably large random sample with equal numbers of males and females. This would assist with revealing a more precise and comprehensive scenario of results for comparison of the gender differences.

Further inclinations for using a relatively large random sample, including equal numbers of females and males, is that it would ensure the utilization of more stringent quantitative statistical analysis on the collected data. For example, the participants could have served as matched groups of the two tests while performing correlation analysis to determine with statistical strength the causal effect or the degree of the relationship between variables of the training sessions, even involving gender differences. So many

quantitative possibilities would have been exciting to perform with a random sample that

had a fairly large number to accommodate t-tests and analysis of variance for multiple

groups.

Another feature missing from this action research project is the inclusion of a

follow-up plan. A three or six month follow-up plan would be a beneficial component to

this project. There were some mothers, in particular, who submitted pertinent information

in the event the church begins to engage in more wholesome and Christian activities

involving children. In compliance with this notion, the approximately fifty children

ranging in ages from four months to age sixteen, were very attentive and obedient

throughout the entire three to four hour action project duration.

Most definitely, if this action research project occurred again, arrangements to

administer a pre-test and post-test to the children would be included. It would have been

interesting to compare their endorsed responses to those of the adults. Their feedback to

the training sessions, discussions, and interactions with the adults would provide

contributory information to this church model for reconnecting families and children to

church life. Yet, the researcher was pleased with the subjective and observational data

that was obtained with the children. Seemingly, they gained much valuable information

on viewing the manner in which the adults interacted with each other.

The children watched with enthusiasm, and their facial countenance indicated that

they were enjoying the hospitable occasion in the presence of the adults. Throughout the

entire training sessions, the children, seemingly, grasped the importance of the various

issues being discussed. They appeared vigilant and quite scholarly in their gazes as the

adults engaged in dialogue concerning topics pertaining to Rockfish African Methodist

Episcopal Church, its members, coupled with families and children reconnection to church life.

Further, the children's attentiveness without any disruption was evident that they appreciated the discussions among the adults that included wholesome activities for them. The children were able to view the enthusiasm that most of the adults displayed in designing programs and activities to promote their spiritual, emotional, financial, and educational growth. Seemingly, their approving facial expressions and obedient behaviors displayed much respect, hopefully leading to increased self-esteem building. Lastly, it was determined that many of the adults and children were comfortable being together in the same inviting and hospitable setting.

Agreed, this action research qualitative project yielded an enormous amount of data. It denotes the urgency to encourage more research in this area to follow, promising interrelated linkages between church and family, especially women and children. Ultimately, the goal is that this church model action research project be replicated with the inclusion of the aforementioned suggestions. There exist insurmountable deleterious circumstances that the families, especially women and children, are encountering on a daily basis that necessitate the interdisciplinary approaches of data analysis.

Therefore, the impetus to engage in more rigorous qualitative research that is designed and implemented to utilize quantitative statistical analysis aligned with the Christian worldview would be an asset. Definitely, this interdisciplinary plan to support the interconnectedness of the church and families, including children, would be a beneficial collaborative effort. Its profound impact would be able to generate a multitude

of paradigms to promote the survival of both entities, church and families, involving the children, within this ever changing global society.

It was interesting to note that many of the participants were very excited about the action research project. Several of them met after the sessions and decided to initiate a fundraising dinner to raise monies to assist the financial needs of a church family member. Such a church undertaken had not occurred since around seven years prior to date. The following day this information was revealed to the researcher as to the fundraising plans for the dinner.

With much speculation from the results of this action research data, the researcher contends that its significance may be utilized to assist other churches with models to support the reconnection of families and children to church life. In sum, this church model has the capabilities of lending support to other churches and families in need of reconnecting families and children to church life. To reiterate, the complexities existing within our global society inevitably spawn detrimental and catastrophic circumstances upon our families, including children, which will directly or secondarily impact the plummeting attendance crisis of many churches. Optimistically, this model for reconnecting families and children to church life will be utilized with churches and families, especially women and children of the community. Also, it is desired that this church model will further serve as a beacon of hope for additional research.

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